GEORGE DOUGLAS BROWN

GEORGE DOUGLAS BROWN

AUTHOR OF
"THE HOUSE WITH THE GREEN SHUTTERS"

A BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR BY
CUTHBERT LENNOX

AND

REMINISCENCES BY ANDREW MELROSE

WITH INTRODUCTION BY
ANDREW LANG

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PREFACE

ONE of the most notable phenomena of recent literary chronicle has been the interest manifested by the reading public in regard to the personality of the late George Douglas Brown, ever since his untimely death in August last. Little was generally known of the antecedents of the young Scottish novelist who, but a few months before, had taken the literary world by surprise with the publication of his distinctly epoch-making novel; and there was no reason to expect that his death would arouse any wide desire for more information. The interest in the

personality of George Douglas Brown, however, has been widespread and persistent; and, as a consequence, the little that was known of the earlier years of the author of "The House with the Green Shutters" has been bandied about in newspaper paragraphs and in slenderly informed magazine articles, until there has been mingled with a modicum of truth a great deal that is misleading and not true. In these circumstances, the novelist's sisters, Mrs. Robert Green and Miss Helen Douglas Brown, have recognised an unexpected call for an authoritative memoir of their brother; and they have responded, notwithstanding the facts that George Douglas Brown "died planning his life-work," and that his fame must depend upon his one novel. They have responded the more willingly from a sense that the savage note in his book has

given to many people the erroneous idea that the novelist was a misanthrope. Thus much for the *raison d'être* of the following pages.

The memoir partakes of a tripartite character, and consists of an introduction, a narrative, and an epilogue. Mr. Andrew Lang, who was one of the earliest to recognise the undoubted literary significance of "The House with the Green Shutters," has contributed an introductory appreciation of the novelist and his work. Mr. Andrew Melrose has kindly permitted the compilers to include in this volume his convincing and intimate pen-portrait of his friend (originally contributed to the columns of *The Bookman*), thereby enabling them to furnish the reader with a lifelike presentment of the genial personality of George Douglas Brown. To the present writer

has been committed the task of setting forth, in simple narrative, the outstanding facts of the novelist's all-too-short life. In view of the contributions made by Mr. Lang and Mr. Melrose, he has confined himself within certain well-defined limits, but he believes that from his quota the reader will gain an accurate idea of the elements of heredity, environment, and training which combined to make George Douglas Brown the man that he was.

It only remains to thank, on behalf of the compilers, the numerous relatives and others who have given friendly aid in the preparation of this volume. Particularly, thanks are due and tendered to Mr. Andrew Lang for his graceful and characteristic introduction; to Mr. Andrew Melrose for permission to reproduce his delightfully reminiscent sketch, which he has revised

and supplemented for the purpose of the present volume; and to Mr. John Dixon, J.P., late of Cumnock, to whose unwearied efforts in the interest of the compilers—in collecting facts, in sifting traditional information, and in many other ways—this memoir largely owes its existence. Record is also made of the grateful appreciation of help rendered by George Douglas Brown's teachers at Glasgow University, Professors Murray, Ramsay, and Jack; by Professor Raleigh, the present occupant of the chair of English Literature at that University; by the Master and Senior Dean of Balliol College, Oxford; by Mr. W. H. C. Davis, Fellow of All Souls' College, Oxford; by Mr. Quentin Aird, Mr. R. Leggat, Mr. M'Curdie, Mr. Wilson (Auchencloich), Mr. H. B. M'Lellan, and several others, all of whom have furnished reminiscences of the novelist's

parents, and of his boyhood and early youth; and by Mr. Howard Spicer, an intimate friend of his London years. The compilers' grateful acknowledgments are also made to the Editor of *The Bookman* for permission to reprint Mr. Andrew Melrose's reminiscences.

CUTHBERT LENNOX.

January, 1903.

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

IN compliance with a request made by a friend of the late Mr. George Douglas Brown, I write a few comments on his life and work. His life I know only through the narrative of Mr. Cuthbert Lennox and an admirable study by Mr. Melrose in *The Bookman*. My own acquaintance with the author of "The House with the Green Shutters" was, unluckily for me, of the slightest. Already, in a magazine, the little that I have to say on this matter has been said, but it may be repeated, as it leads up to the only conclusion I had arrived at about Mr. Brown—namely, that he and his genius were an interesting enigma. Thanks

to the records of Mr. Melrose and Mr. Lennox, one can now understand him better, or, at least, feel less puzzled.

It occasionally, but rarely, falls to my lot to review a group of novels. One does not find many surprises in the course of such adventures. The romances, in their bright coloured boards, are found to fall into certain definite and familiar categories. There is the large and artless category written for ladies, by ladies. These probably give to the fair pillars or caryatides of the circulating libraries exactly what they desire, but the male reader they do not over-stimulate. Then there are the didactic novels. Most are of various colours of socialism, in some cases complicated with the problems attending the ritual of the Anglican communion. The "love interest" in these romances is rather perfunctory ; and the hero is usually knocked

on the head in a British or foreign strike, much to my private satisfaction. Other didactic novels deal with the problems of Belief, and the inferences to be drawn from the Higher Criticism, as apprehended through liberal manuals of devotion and the monthly magazines. Personally I prefer to take my Higher Criticism "neat," and from the fountain heads, rather than from didactic novels. Then there is the improper didactic, on the merits of simple and compound adultery, and of any more esoteric vices which the author may have picked up in the course of her study or practice. These fictions, to my private taste, are unalluring. Not much more attractive are most of the historical novels, by persons of genius, perhaps, but certainly not by experts in historical research. There are also slum novels, which are a sub-class of the didactic,

and there are novels that "stand in a false following of" Mr. George Meredith, things of portentously affected dulness. There are novels about the vices of Society, which, as we have the newspapers always with us, appear rather luxuries than necessaries. There are detective novels, which, unlike the other kinds, "are not literature," but compared with the others may occasionally be readable. There are other kinds. And, there are, happily, a few novels every year, by real novelists, of whom I could gratefully mention at least two dozen, but to name them might be invidious.

When a man has made his way through a wilderness of the novels which fall into the categories already enumerated, when he has totally rejected some, and conscientiously said his say about others, and finds one remaining, signed by a name unknown in

literature, though thoroughly familiar in history—George Douglas—he regards that work askance, and almost with aversion. In such a spirit I took up "The House with the Green Shutters." I knew, as any reviewer of experience must have known, that behind the green shutters foul unnatural murder would be done. However, in the modern fiction of every day, murder is almost a virtue; besides, there might perhaps be a ghost in the tale; certainly, I thought, a detective. So I opened the book.

In five minutes I found myself where the Jacobite exile of the song desired to be—"in my ain countrie," benorth Tweed. This, in itself, is not unusual in novels. I have not hitherto mentioned "the Kailyard school." That school, I venture to assert, has, by dint of a clever nickname, come to be unduly despised, *en masse*, by persons of

culture; I mean of the kind of culture that is the child, not of education, not of experience, but of casual veerings of opinion. You may call Burns and Hogg Kailyard poets. You may call Scott's best passages of rural life and character and most of Galt "Kailyard." Nicknames, like blank verse, are "not argument." Many excellent, some really admirable, works have been executed by Kailyarders. Not all of them "wallow naked in the pathetic," or serve up death-bed scenes. Were it not for Dickens, one might say that no great novelist wallows in the pathetic, or revels in death-beds. If one must be plain, I think that the Kailyarders give us more of actual humanity than Mr. Brown chose to do in his one novel; but to this matter I return.

At all events, though the scene was in Scotland, the novel had nothing of the Kail-

yard. It was urban; in what an *urbs*! A little Scottish town, with the most fresh and pleasing nature visible from all the streets, with blue hills, and those waters which are the dearest of things to the Scot, with woods of summer—such was Barbie. It reminded one of half a dozen such little towns, the inhabitants whereof, on a Sunday, you may see congregated at street corners, "wasting their mercies." "The Devil made the country town," some one says, and he certainly made the town of the novel. But the atmosphere, so to speak, was true Scottish, and one had seen the shops, the carts, the straggling irregular houses, the ups and downs of grass-fringed streets, and the bodies daidling about them, observant of infinitely minute trifles, avid of local gossip.

Barbie was just about to be dragged, or to project herself, into the great cosmic

movement. The railway was coming; coal-mines were at hand; the bodies did not speak Scots so much as a hideously deformed English. Then the detestable people took hold of one, with their naked selfishness—"Where do I come in?" is their slogan; with their grudgingness, their *ἐπιχαιρεκακία* (the Germans have a word for it, the joy in other people's troubles: *Schadenfreude*); with their invincible ignorance of good motives; their niggling ingenuity in finding bad motives; their sleepless envy. I scarcely know why I should think that these *are* the vices of a little Scottish country town: certainly it is not from personal experience. But they seemed to be accurately portrayed, these features of character; and in contrast with the peddling devilry of the deacons and traders, the bold, big bully and king of Barbie seemed relatively amiable. He rather

trampled on his neighbours like an elephant, than tormented them with poisoned pin-pricks. He was odious in a more lordly way, and more hated for his success, his green shutters, his bright poker (here, clearly, was the tool for the murder), than for his brutality.

So one read on, and found none righteous ; no, not one. The Burns-loving baker seemed least alien from humanity ; but one conceived that the author, whoever he might be, had suffered a good deal from "Burns's blethering bitches," the wrong set of his admirers.

Every one who glances at this page will remember the other characters—the helpless, hapless wife ; the dying daughter, stunted and plain ; the useless son, with his spark of genius—a wonderful invention ; the minister, peerless in his stupidity and conceit ; the fuddled, whiskyfied laird (in whom, given the period, I never could believe) ; the

mischievous, wanton schoolboys, as envious as their parents; the cleverer and meaner rogue who ruins the town bully—the whole pack of them without a righteous Lot (Lot's righteousness is inconspicuous) in the whole odious hive. There is not a gentleman or a lady in whatever rank, though among the poor of Scotland there are many with the hearts and manners of true gentlemen and ladies. The vulgar students, "ragging" their professor, have all the exuberant and brazen blatancy of the unlicked Scottish young cub at his worst, without any of his qualities. There is not a pretty face in the book: nothing at all of beauty except the landscape, which affords a momentary relief. As for the harrowing conclusion, when nakedly set down in an abstract it is much less terrible than grotesque. In brief, the pessimism, the blackness, was all

that my soul detests ; yet I read on and on ; after the clock struck the hour of retiring. Now, if a book seizes hold of you like this, there is something not common in the book. It offended, but conquered, *mon naturel.*

The effect was that, knowing " every fellow likes a hand," as Mr. Henry Foker says, especially every beginner, I took my courage in both hands, and wrote a note to Mr. Brown. It was merely to say that his book had much interested me, though I had a childish preference for novels about wigs on the green and swords in the sun. He replied that he had it in his mind to do something more cheerful, and that, whenever he wanted to relieve the gloom of his first story, the memory of another writer came across him, and he determined to portray Scots who were not like that other author's Caledonian peasantry.

We met later, at a club, but then I went north, and, except for a letter in which Mr. Brown gave me some news of the progress of his tale in public favour, I heard no more of him till the telegram which was carried by a barefoot little messenger across Lismore brought the news of his death.

Thus I cannot speak of him from personal knowledge. We were both Balliol men; both had profited by the endowment of John Snell, Esq., like better scholars than either of us—Adam Smith, Lockhart, and many others. A story is told in Mr. Lennox's narrative which implies Mr. Brown's lack of beauty. He was no more an Adonis than most of the sex; his brow appeared to be heavy, as it were, and to give a somewhat pensive and melancholy cast to his features. One could not have

guessed that his youth had been so much unlike that of most undergraduates as Mr. Lennox's narrative tells, but clearly his life had not been altogether sunny. He did not show more reserve than is natural and usual on meeting several strangers, most of them much his seniors. Two of the party had been engaged in the Boer War; one was returning as chief of Lord Kitchener's staff, one was a learned historian; and, with these and other guests, I could not have much conversation with Mr. Brown. The enigma, of course, was, how so young a man, except in an old Scots phrase, "for the fashion," could take such a gloomy view of life—anywhere—as he took in his novel. The answer which occurs to one, after reading Mr. Lennox's account of his roseate view of Bayswater, is that the blackness of Barbie was a mere artistic

convention. All Scots are not humorous, brave, beautiful, pious, and self-denying, as they are absurdly said to be represented by the Kailyarders. Yet, perhaps, these pleasing characteristics of the race are rather exaggerated by some Kailyarders, while the other side—the seamy side—is comparatively neglected. Now it is true, and Mr. Brown would not have denied it, that our Scottish reserve is often tempered by unexpected and rather unwelcome effusiveness. Many of our writers have a sort of sentiment that utters itself with the unction of the pulpit. There is a kind of Dr. Chalmers-ish element in the minor national literature. It corresponds to a mood, just as Burns's pious Saturday night of the cottager corresponds to a mood of Burns's mind. This kind of emotion, so prevalent in Scotland, is kept out of Barbie,

yet it must have been there. It is omitted, everything not evil is omitted, and this could only be of set purpose. There is also a kind of "blethering" humour, by which the speaker or author lets his mind meander freely in a tedious, half-jocose, half-melancholy manner in metaphysics and human fortunes, apparently hoping to hit on something good, somewhere. Nobody at Barbie does that. In short, these minor, but not wholly unamiable Caledonian foibles are as much absent as generous deeds or emotions.

A young man who had the humour, and good humour, to take pleasure in contemplating the housewives of Bayswater must inevitably have found and recognised still more agreeable things in the neighbourhood of Ochiltree. The very name is agreeable, so charged with memories of the

old Stewarts of Ochiltree, the pious old conspirator and friend of Knox; his daughter, Knox's child-bride; his son, the great soldier of fortune, who dragged down Morton, who was the hammer of the preachers—of these people, and of the Lollards of Kyle, the name of Ochiltree reminds a man. I doubt not that honest men and bonnie lasses abound; they do at Ballantrae, the only place in the shire with which I am familiar. Mr. Brown, wandering as a tramp where Louis Stevenson had tramped before, must have met plenty of good kind folk, and his black descriptions were a freak or sport of fancy. "It's ugly, but is it art?" I think it is art, but freakish, and, to use a Scots word for our national characteristic, it is "thrawn." We are *not* a gracious people, south of the Highland line. Mr. Brown's was a "thrawn" picture

of his countryside, not like the pictures of Galt and Scott, which remain the best.

But the pleasant thing to remember is that his countryside did not resent Barbie. Mr. Brown returned thither in a halo of heroism, and enjoyed himself. Compare the fortunes of Mr. Henry James! He drew in "Daisy Miller" a picture of a pretty, kind, rather trivial, and quite untrained girl, *au fond*, a bewitching girl, and was accused of libelling American maidenhood! At Barbie they were not so absurdly touchy. The town band there did not turn out to welcome young men who got college prizes; that we learn from the novel. I dare say Barbie thought very little of these distinctions. But the local heart was clearly in the right place; and Mr. Brown had reason to know it.

For the rest, he, like many Scots, went

to Oxford too late, and there had to do the work which he was already weary of, and he was poor, and he had the rooms in which another Scot, a friend of mine, was buried, as a freshman. These rooms ought to be condemned. Thus I fear that Mr. Brown's time at Oxford was wasted. He might have got a first and a fellowship, but he did not choose to take the trouble. He, like other young Scots of my acquaintance, was totally indifferent to money and money-making. Unlike Mr. Stevenson (who certainly was no money-grubber), he could have made himself very comfortable by the pen of the journalist. As an old pressman, I confess that I could not write a "leader-note" without enjoying the doing of it, whether the public enjoyed the reading of it or not. But Mr. Brown had not this

unusual privilege of nature. Clearly he liked his own untrammelled way, and the society of his own thoughts. He even liked London. Doubtless he was happy enough in his own fashion. One is not to think of him as a gloomy misanthrope. Literature in itself was his constant joy, though he appears to have been rather exclusive in his choice of books: a deep, not a wide reader. He had friends to his heart's desire. Then he won a triumph, and the Fates, with shears kind or abhorrent—who can tell?—cut his thin-spun thread.

In thinking of him and reading about him, I am reminded of two others who never reached success, and of one who did—Thomas Davidson (the Scottish Probationer); R. F. Murray, the student poet of the scarlet gown, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

It is natural to regret that Mr. Stevenson never met Mr. Brown: often, on a hundred occasions, one misses him, and his power of appreciating interesting things and men. "They all are gone into the world of light."

A. LANG.

Kindred and Parents

CHAPTER I

KINDRED AND PARENTS

GEORGE DOUGLAS BROWN sprang from an interesting stock; and some account of his kindred and parents may fittingly precede the narrative of his life.

The remotest known progenitor of the subject of this memoir was a certain Susie Douglas, who, according to a most circumstantial tradition, was the child of a member of a noble Scottish family of ancient renown, and of a daughter of an old Ayrshire family of landed proprietors. Begotten outwith the bounds of the ceremonial law, Susie Douglas enjoyed the affectionate care and upbringing

bestowed upon her by foster parents, who belonged to the rank of Scottish yeomen; and in due course she was married to one who occupied the same station in life—Nicholson by name. Of the descendants of this union (children or grandchildren, it is understood) we next hear of Robert Nicholson and Margaret Nicholson, brother and sister. Robert Nicholson was factor to the Ayrshire laird of Ballochmyle, and tenant in the farm of Kingencleuch, at Mauchline. He was evidently a man of considerable ability, and found scope for literary expression in writing frequently for the newspapers. Margaret (or Peggy) Nicholson married George Brown, tenant of the farm of Benthead, in the parish of Sorn, and became the mother of a family of six sons and one daughter.

Two sons, Alexander and John, born in

1802 and 1805 respectively, died in infancy. The other children, in the order of their birth, were John Nicholson, Mungo, Francis Nicholson, George Douglas, and Helen Hood. All have left a reputation for distinctive ability and character—according to the fireside traditions of Kyle, not to speak of more exact records available. "The Browns were all clever," and as they belong to the generation immediately preceding that of the subject of this memoir, the story of their achievements may not be out of place here.

John Nicholson Brown was born in 1806. His parents' circumstances would appear to have been somewhat narrow, for he had little schooling of the ordinary sort, spending only eighteen short months at Sorn parish school, acquiring the art of writing—in company with his brother Frank—by using a charred

stick for a pencil, and carrying his books with him when herding his parent's sheep on Blaksey Den Hill, part of the farm of Benthead. According to a memorial tablet in Sorn Kirkyard, he was "a self-taught man." "He supported himself from the age of eight," and "devoted his leisure hours from daily toil to pursuit of self-acquired knowledge."

Visiting occasionally at his uncle's house at Ballochmyle, the eager lad made the acquaintance of a cook or housekeeper who had travelled abroad with the Ballochmyle family. He learned from her a number of French words, and conceived an ambition to learn the French language. In this pursuit he must have been conspicuously successful, for, in or about 1828, at the early age of twenty-one, he made his way to Paris, and found there congenial occupation as a teacher

of the English language. The Sorn tablet records the fact that he taught in some of the first families of France, and was eventually appointed a professor in the College of St. Barbe, in Paris.

Reputed to have been one of the most handsome men in Ayrshire, John Nicholson Brown married his cousin, Susie Nicholson, to whom tradition accords the possession of distinctive beauty. Two children were born of the marriage, but they were left fatherless at a tender age. Knowledge and advancement in life had been acquired at too great an expenditure of vital energy, and John Nicholson Brown died in 1841, at the early age of thirty-four.

This eldest son of Benthead combined literary ambition with his other gifts and qualities. Years after, his nephew, George Douglas Brown, rummaging in a box of

books that had belonged to his uncle, discovered the manuscripts of two works in an advanced state of preparation for the press. One was a novel, the plot of which was based upon the circumstantial tradition concerning the begetting of Susie Douglas, already referred to. The other manuscript work dealt with political and educational matters, and was found to have advocated reforms which have only in recent years approved themselves generally and received legislative sanction. "This man has seen a bit before him," said George Douglas Brown. "Things are coming to pass now as he had foreseen."

Of Mungo Brown, the second of the Benthead family to reach manhood, there is less to tell. Born in 1809, he had the same hardships to face as had his brothers, but his tastes lay in the direction of his

greatest opportunities, and he qualified himself for the occupation of a farmer; becoming eventually the tenant of Bogwood, near Mauchline, and acting also as factor for the laird of Nether-Place.

Francis Nicholson Brown, born in 1811, was more of a mind with his brother John, and his schooling was of the same rude sort. With him the thirst for books and intellectual faring was quite as strong, and he was able at an early age to undertake the work of teaching in his native parish. But he had scarcely attained the age of twenty-three before he, too, in 1834, made his way to Paris, in search of occupation similar to that which his brother had found. He used to tell a curious story of his first introduction. Returning at night to the inn in Paris at which he had taken up his temporary quarters, when he sought his

room he found his bed occupied by a stranger. Rather than disturb the intruder, he made shift elsewhere for the night, and in the morning received the grateful thanks of the abbé, who had mistaken his room. Learning the object of the young Scot's journey to Paris, the abbé furnished him with an introduction to the family of General the Marquis de Lafayette. "I send you," he wrote, "a young Scotsman who carries his passport upon his forehead." From that time forth, he found constant and congenial occupation in teaching English in seminaries and families in Paris, and in reading English with literary men. It is said that he had considerable success in this work, and "had his pupils speaking English in a few days." There is also an unconfirmed tradition that he taught in the family of Louis Philippe itself. He conceived

a strong sympathy with the educated Frenchman; and, notwithstanding the death of his brother in 1841, and the social and political unrest which found expression in the deposition of Charles X. in 1830, and the subsequent abdication of Louis Philippe and restoration of the Republic in 1848, he continued his professional work in Paris until 1851, when the *Coup d'Etat* seemed to forebode further social upheavals altogether hurtful to his interests. He abandoned Paris, and returned to Scotland, where he sought and found in Edinburgh a sphere of professional activity as a teacher of French. Within a short time he secured a number of important engagements, and acted as French master at George Watson's College, Stewart's Hospital, the Trades Maidens' Hospital, the Church of Scotland Training College for Teachers, and a number of private schools.

During fourteen busy years, Francis Brown pursued his calling in Edinburgh, finding domestic happiness in marriage with Miss Armour, and enjoying intimate social and intellectual intercourse with many of the professional men in the city—among others, the well-known Dr. Lee of Greyfriars and Dr. Currie, rector of the Church of Scotland Training College. In 1865, he developed serious heart disease, and, after a lingering illness, died on December 11th in that year.

There is a contemporary portrait of Francis Nicholson Brown in the obituary notice which Dr. Currie contributed to the columns of the *Scotsman* at the time. The following extracts may be quoted from Dr. Currie's tribute to his friend :—

"A residence of seventeen years in Paris and in such circumstances could not fail

to leave a deep impression on the mind of one endowed with so quick an observation and so discriminating a judgment in matters of life, and with so lively an appreciation of the higher qualities of manhood. But while it gave him the vivacity, the liberality, the enlarged sympathies and information, and the power of clear and pointed conversation, which belong to a French gentleman, it did not weaken by one iota the intellectual muscle and fibre, the *perfervidum ingenium*, the mass and momentum of character, which his native Ayrshire gave him; so that on his return to this country, his friends, old and new, were delighted to find in him so striking and pleasant a harmony of the best points in the national character of both countries. . . . For literature—particularly poetry—and for history, he had very keen susceptibilities. To say that he was familiar

with the masterpieces of both countries is to say but little; could we imagine that by some fatality our own Shakespeare, Scott, Byron, and Burns, and their counterparts in France, from Molière to Béranger, had been lost, few men alive could have done more to replace them from memory. A catholic sympathy for letters, a sound and penetrating critical instinct, a singular strength and clearness of conception, a never-failing freshness of feeling, and a power and propriety in speech such as we commonly look for in written composition alone, enabled him to discourse to sympathetic listeners of literary characteristics with the insight and, at times, the fervour of a seer; and in the sphere of history—of French history particularly, which he had studied by the strong light of sympathy and acquaintance with the current life of the

people—the sweep and essential soundness of his judgments were not more a source of instruction to his friends, than the truly dramatic power of his descriptions was their delight. But there was a higher charm for them than even these qualities, in the nobleness and simplicity of his whole nature. Ever generous, ever unselfish, alike in the bloom of his strength and under a severe malady, which wore out the body but could not cloud the soul, his first thoughts were of others, his last of himself. He was of those rare spirits before whom anything that was mean, petty, or ambiguous soon came to feel itself uneasy and abashed. It was this that made his presence elevating while he lived, and that will make his memory a precious possession to many now that he is gone."

Helen Hood Brown, the only girl in the

family at Benthead, was born in 1815. For her, too, mental culture had its fascination; as, in her earlier womanhood, she kept a school, and acquired the reputation of being an exceptionally clever woman. Eventually she became the wife of Ivy Campbell Sloan, a Scotsman who had amassed a considerable fortune in some line of business in Australia. Mrs. Sloan died at Catrine at the age of fifty-four.

GEORGE DOUGLAS BROWN, senior, the father of the subject of this sketch, was born on July 2nd, 1813, and was thus the youngest of the sons at Benthead. His father died while George was still very young, and the boy was shut in to the necessity of helping his mother to complete the tack or lease in Benthead, and thereafter to make a livelihood at the cottage in the village of Sorn to which she removed

at the expiry of the lease. For a good many years after he reached manhood, and after Benthead had been given up, George kept a horse and cart, and did jobbing work as a carting contractor. Then Ivy Campbell Sloan came home with a stout purse, and did much to alter the situation. Having built a cottage at Catrine, and removed thither not only his wife, but his mother-in-law, he set George free to make shift for himself, and even advanced him money towards the stocking of a farm. In or about 1861 the farm of Drumsmudden, in the parish of Ochiltree, was taken by George, and the district of Sorn knew him no more.

The farm was one of about two hundred acres. It was worked by a single pair of horses, as it consisted chiefly of rough grazing land. With a byre of about thirty

cows, it was, like many of its neighbours, principally a dairy farm, producing milk, butter, and cheese.

As a farmer, "Drumsmudden," or "'Smudden" for short—as he was colloquially styled—stood well in the eyes of his neighbours, and his credit was good. But, over and above this, he shared in the "cleverness" with which the Brown family was endowed. He was reckoned one of the best educated men in the Ochiltree and Cumnock district. "He gave ample evidence of being well informed and deeply read," says one who had intimate business relations with him over a long period of years. "He was a clever man," says another, and "clever" is the word almost uniformly used by those who knew him well, when they seek to convey an impression of his alertness of intellect, breadth of outlook, and wealth of

information on all conceivable topics. His tastes were not literary, like those of his brothers John and Frank; but, if other proof were lacking, there is circumstantial evidence that he was no mere clodhopper, in the fact that in his early years he visited his brothers in Paris. There his pranks and pliskies sorely perplexed his hosts, and they greatly feared that, from sheer desire to tease them, he would get himself into some mischief with the civil authorities. Drumsmudden was of slight build, and in stature he was below rather than above the average height; his features were small and sharp, his hair was dark, and his eyes were black and keen, and full of meaning.

It only remains to speak of the mother of the subject of this memoir. She was the daughter of an Irishman of the name of

Gemmel, who had lived in Ochiltree for a generation. Quiet in manner, she was above the average height, had ruddy fair hair, and bluish eyes. A capable woman, very managing and very saving, she was an expert in all the arts of housewifery and in the craft of the dairy. Possessing mental qualities of no ordinary kind, brave and courageous, she was withal kind of heart and ready of sympathy.

Birth and Early Years

CHAPTER II

BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS

GEORGE DOUGLAS BROWN, secundus, "Drumsmudden's" eldest son, was born at Ochiltree on January 26th, 1869. By general account, he bore a close resemblance to his father in features, in build, and in temperament. But in the natural course of things, it was to his mother that he was indebted for the earliest formative influences of his life, and between mother and son there was founded a strong and enduring mutual affection and regard.

There is little to record of Geordie's earliest days, but those who knew him as

a "wee laddie" speak of him as having been a conspicuously bright-tempered child. Handy and ready-witted, he was always the best of company, even for those who were a good many years his senior.

Geordie laid the foundations of his elementary education at the village school. He was willing and eager, and when he passed on to school in the adjacent parish of Coylton, his teacher, Mr. Smith, found no difficulty in stimulating his desire for learning, and carrying him forward without hindrance to a pass in the sixth standard, then the exit qualification in schools under the Scottish Education Department. His former schoolmates remember, with a suspicion of unconscious envy, that it cost Geordie no effort to learn his lessons. He stood well in all his classes, and, in consequence, was never in his teacher's bad books.

One suggestive reminiscence of those days is that he seemed to prefer the company of a "penny dreadful" to that of his playmates.

Mr. Smith has put it upon record that Geordie, even in these early days, distinguished himself by the ready facility with which he overtook the weekly task of written composition required from his class. His essays were easily the best in the class. His schoolmates were the first to acknowledge this, and used to listen with delight when Geordie's latest effusion was read aloud. These essays were frequently concluded or supplemented by a short effort in verse composition, in one or other of the stanzas in which Burns had proved the tunefulness of the Scots vernacular.

Most boys arrive at an early decision as to the vocation in life that they would follow

by preference, and Geordie seems to have expressed, at one time or another, a vague desire to become a school inspector; but, when he had passed the sixth standard with Mr. Smith at Coylton in 1881, and had later received supplementary tuition for short periods from Mr. Hyslop at Cronberry, and Mr. Andrew at Ochiltree, it appeared for a time that he had reached the limit of his proper schooling. His parents had no margin of income that would provide for more than bare necessities, and for a couple of years Geordie earned his livelihood by the use of his hands, being employed for some time at the pit-head at Trabbock, in the uninteresting work of picking stones and other objectionable material from among the coal as it came from the pit.

But one day Geordie heard that a school-

mate, whose parents were in no better circumstances than his own, had gone to the famous secondary school, Ayr Academy, and his ambition prompted him to suggest that he should be sent to Ayr also. An interview with Mr. Maybin, then, and still, rector of the academy, resulted in an arrangement that the boy should have his opportunity. For six months or so after he had gone to the academy he did little to justify the parental self-denial and the generosity of Mr. Maybin that had made his schooling at Ayr at all possible. At this time he happened to overhear a conversation between the rector and one of the masters, and learned that they considered it hopeless to keep him longer at school unless he showed signs of better work. When the conversation between the teachers resulted in his being asked to write an

essay, it was found that the boy's pride and ambition had received the necessary stimulus, and he displayed in the execution of his task so promising a grasp of literature that all thought of sending him down was abandoned.

From that date, George "worked like a trooper," with the result that, among many talented schoolfellows, he took a conspicuously successful place, and eventually carried everything before him, only missing the blue ribbon of the school—the Cowan Gold Medal—on account of his deficiency in mathematical scholarship. To-day Mr. Maybin looks back upon George Douglas Brown as one of his most brilliant pupils. Mr. Gemmell, now rector of Greenock Academy, recalls the remarkable individuality and excellence of his English essays. These were distinguished by the sequence and originality of their propositions,

by their effective and truthful descriptions of places and people, and by their evidence of an unusually well-developed faculty for minute observation. In one of these essays he displayed a remarkably matured and original perception of the quality and scope of the poetry of Burns; and in another, still remembered by his teacher, he gave a vivid picture of the High Street of Ayr on a Saturday night, and particularly of a local character—an Irish street singer. George was not slow to acknowledge the value of the benefits he received in Ayr Academy. "To it," he afterwards said, "I owe everything that I am."

No boy is exactly what his schoolmasters make him. There are other formative influences which exercise at least an equal power in the development of temperament and character. In George Douglas Brown's

case, these influences were peculiarly rich and potent. There was the intercourse with his parents, both people of marked character, and with the sons of the soil in his neighbourhood; there was the pleasantly picturesque environment of the district of Kyle; there were the personal and historical associations which coloured the past of almost every object upon which the eye could alight for miles around.

It has been seen how closely knit were the ties of natural affection between mother and son. Of his father, George was very proud, and once remarked with boyish finality: "He is the cleverest man I ever met with." At another time, he said of his parents, that they were the only two people in the world for him.

At Drumsmudden, when school vacations permitted, George occupied a garret as a

study; but he was more frequently to be found in the field, lending a hand to Geordie Miller or "Henry" as they went about their work. He was companionable with everybody, and had a fair share of boyish mischievousness. On one occasion, "when he was a lump of a boy at school," he stood up on the corn chest in the stable and delivered a prayer that, in Geordie Miller's opinion, was equal to anything he had ever heard from a pulpit. Then he assumed the rôle of advocate and judge, and tried Henry for an imagined murder, found him guilty, and condemned him to death. And yet, even in these days, with all his lightness and cleverness, he was very reticent upon first acquaintance, until the preliminaries of conversation had thawed the ice.

In Ayrshire, and, in particular, in the more immediate neighbourhood of Ochiltree,

the landscape is charmingly picturesque, both in its wider prospects and in detail. Moorland and pasture, arable land and richly wooded country, pleasantly diversify the scenery. The countryside is watered and drained by streams and rivers whose banks abound in leafy shades and secluded nooks; where the wanderer may enjoy "the dim, delicious greenness that comes down through the spring foliage"; while the undulations of its surface deliver its roads from the least impression of monotony. The wayfarer is enabled at one point to observe the clouds billowing over a wide expanse of sky, and note the conspicuous landmarks for many miles around: farther on, perhaps only half a mile away, he is shut in to the contemplation of a substantial farm-steading, with well-filled stackyard, and whitewashed walls, dazzlingly clean. Fecund nature responds

to the cheerful rays of the sun, and everywhere the colour note is rich and unstrained. For a boy with the gift of observation, an environment like this was bound to afford artistic education of a generous sort.

This part of the country, too, abounds in historical and literary associations well calculated to stir the patriot soul, and fire the ambition of youth. Ayrshire, doubtless on account of its fertile land and convenient seaboard, was one of the earliest anchorages for civilised and settled habitation in Scotland, and no square mile is without some ruins to tell of its long history—tumulus, or castle, or religious house, or baronial fortalice. Memories of the earliest Scottish kings, of Wallace, and of Bruce haunt the district; and later centuries have contributed their share. John Knox and Bloody Grahame of Claverhouse got their respective wives from

Ochiltree House; James Boswell entertained Dr. Johnson at Auchinleck House; William Murdock, the inventor of coal gas as an illuminant, made his first experiments in a cave near Auchinleck; John Galt, the novelist, was a native of Irvine, and won fame from his pictures of the circumscribed life of just such towns and villages as abound in Ayrshire. But the chiefest interest of all is doubtless found in the fact that this is *par excellence* the land of Burns. Mossgiel lies above Mauchline, within sight of "the cornfields of Ochiltree," and the countryside abounds in associations with incidents in the everyday life of this most human of great bards.

In this environment, George Douglas Brown spent the whole of the first eighteen years of his life.

Student Days: Glasgow, 1887-91

CHAPTER III

STUDENT DAYS : GLASGOW, 1887-91

WHEN George Brown matriculated at Glasgow University in October, 1887, the thoroughness of his previous education was at once put to the test. He sat for and passed the Preliminary Examination, which secured exemption from the necessity of taking the Junior Greek and Junior Latin classes in the Arts curriculum ; and, in the Bursary competition, open to the whole University, he took sixteenth place, and was awarded the Cowan bursary of £35 specially reserved for Ayr Academy boys, and tenable for two years.

In his first session, 1887-8, Brown took the Senior Latin and Senior Greek classes. In the Latin class, under the tuition of Professor Ramsay, he proved a careful student, always being well prepared. He took a fairly good place in his general papers, but did not do particularly well in Latin Prose Composition, always the test of scholarship in this subject. His work throughout was sound, however, and he took the second prize in the second section of the class, standing thus among the first twenty-five or thirty students in his year.

In the Senior Greek class, under Professor Sir Richard Jebb, Brown proved himself a better Grecian, taking the fourth place at the close of the session's work.

The subsidies that he could draw from home were but slender, and, bursaries notwithstanding, Brown's circumstances must

have borne a painful resemblance to those of the proverbial Scots student who subsisted throughout the long winter session of six months upon two bags of oatmeal and two sacks of potatoes. There is little ground for surprise, therefore, in the fact that he took little or no part in the social phases of aggregate student life. The Dialectic, the Philosophical, and the Alexandrian Societies knew him not; and he rather found rest and recreation in the feast of reason and flow of soul provided in a "crack" with a few college cronies, or in seeking the homely firesides of kindly Ayrshire folk exiled in Glasgow. In one such home he spent many "week-ends," and there he was always ready and anxious to lend a helping hand in any domestic work that might be going on—putting in coals, cleaning up the kitchen, and the like.

Brown's slender purse must have made it necessary to be content with very humble "lodgings," and frequent experiments alone would secure him in the best accommodation to be had at his price. It is said that he changed his lodgings every fortnight; and his declaration that he moved so often for the purpose of "getting information" does not dissipate the suspicion that he had difficulty in finding quarters where he could be sure of the necessary minimum of cleanliness and quiet. Of course, he desired to indicate a purpose to study vagaries of human society, and herein we have the first indication of an artistic interest in his environment.

Throughout his student career, Brown kept in close touch with his home and his people. At Drumsmudden a quey (two-year-old heifer) was fattened and sold for him every

year, and he got the proceeds ; while frequent boxes renewed his store of the simple victuals that were procured on a farm more easily than money could be. When the vacations came round, he left the grimy city with great readiness, and threw himself into the daily life and work at Drumsmudden. "He could turn hay with any man," as one has said, and that he knew the exhaustion of continuous physical labour is made evident in the following sentences. "Only those who know the hairst-rig can remember how glad they have been of any 'haivers' to make them forget the agony in the shoulders and the pain of the aching fingers, of any 'claivers' that would help to 'wear awa'' the long monotonous hours, on days when the sun was merciless, and 'raw' was added to 'raw' with a slowness and sureness that was maddening.

'Still shearin' and clearin'
The tither stooket raw,
Wi' claivers and haivers
Wearin' the day awa'.'

When you croon the words over after many years, you feel once more in memory the relief that the gossip on the head-rig used to bring."

If the days were long, the nights were short. Drumsmudden used to send George off to bed at ten o'clock; but, in step with the sister who used to take him his candle and bid him an ostensible good-night, he would return to the kitchen, where the young people would entertain each other in games of cards, and long leisurely "cracks."

The chronicles of Brown's life at this period point to something like a persistent study of the habits, characteristics, and eccentricities of the men and women

with whom he came in contact. In particular, he manifested a keen interest in the Doric words and expressions used in the direct and forcible speech of the countryside. He would purposely irritate passing vagabonds, so that he might hear their resentful phrases. He would even tease his father with the same object, and, by all accounts, he had there a fertile field for research and observation.

Drumsmudden had "an uncommon way of expressing himself." Our informant illustrates his comment by telling us that he once heard Drumsmudden say to a man who was sitting at table with him and making a manifestly poor meal: "Man, stick in like a soo in a pratie pit, and no sit there mumpin' like a rabbit." There are numerous anecdotes of Drumsmudden's forcible language, but we limit ourselves

to quoting one that has been given to the public by Mr. Robert Barr in an article in *M'Clure's Magazine* :—

"Brown said that his father was the most profane man in the district, and yet a man of sterling good heart. As a little boy he remembered listening appalled to a conversation which took place between his father and an elder of the Church, who had just risen from what had been supposed his death-bed, and now was crawling tremulously out into the sun, his gaunt hand shaking on the end of the stick that supported him.

"'Ye auld deevle,' cried the elder Brown, 'hell hasna swallowed ye yet, when we a' thocht it yawned for ye.'

"'Through the mercy of God,' quavered the tremulous voice of the convalescent, 'I have been spared a few days longer on this earth.'

"'Ye dodderin' thief,' roared Brown, 'there's nae mercy aboot it. Grim Satan simply sees ye're nae ripe yet for perdition, so he leaves ye in ye'r sins for a while langer.'

"'We're a' sinfu' men, Brown,' returned the elder solemnly, in no way offended by the harsh greeting, 'and our hope rests in the benevolence of Heaven.'

"'Weel, weel, ye auld sinner, I'm —— glad to see ye; —— glad to see ye on ye'r feet again. Mony's the time I've looked at ye'r hoose and feared to see the blinds doon, curse ye!'

"'Thank'ee kindly, thank'ee kindly, Brown,' said the aged elder, with tears in his eyes. 'I knew I had ye'r guid wishes.'"

The literary instinct dictated an expedition of amateur vagrancy which took

place in the summer of 1888. Dressing himself in a flannel shirt and the oldest suit of clothes he could get hold of, putting on a pair of worn-out boots, and donning an old straw hat, destitute of band or other suspicion of respectability, Brown set out from his father's farm about twelve o'clock one night, and succeeded in reaching New Cumnock, twelve miles off, before daylight. In this way he escaped the observation of any who might recognise him: beyond New Cumnock and throughout Dumfriesshire—to which he confined his tour—he was among absolute strangers. Assuming the rôle of a professional gangrel, he associated with other tramps on the road, and learned from them of places where he might hope for a good supper and a bed in the barn. In the towns he found shelter in "model" lodging-houses.

The tour extended over three weeks, and in its course he must have met many strange specimens of the flotsam and jetsam of society, as well as fully tested the pleasures and hardships of tramp life. It furnished him, besides, with a store of amusing anecdotes. One day he had "an awful set-down from a pair of lassies." Tired and footsore, he had taken off his boots and lain down at the roadside, smoking his short clay pipe. Two girls approaching, he heard the ejaculation: "There's a tramp!" They passed unmolested, and after they imagined themselves out of earshot one of them said: "Eh! He was an awfully ugly one." Nearing the end of his tour, and feeling rather done up, he asked for a "lift" from the driver of an aërated-water manufacturer's van. This was kindly granted, and he fell into conversation with his new acquaintance.

He maintained his "tramp" disguise, but occasionally he forgot himself, and at last his friend in need looked at him with suspicion and said: "I doot, me lad, you have seen better days." Brown would no doubt rise to the occasion, but when he told the story afterwards he confessed that the situation was the most embarrassing one in his whole excursion.

In a poem of his later days, Brown recalled the experiences of this tramp—the call of the shrilling laverock; the contemplation of the clouds melting in the summer sky, and of the lonely sheep feeding on the hill; the "happy sadness," which came over him as he watched the "waving shadows" borne over the yellow fields of corn on a Sabbath morning; the observation of "nosin' mousie," "the bits o' wormies," the rootlets peeping through "the mools,"

the thud of the ripened acorn as it fell; "possessin' nocht," he possessed it all—

> "A king may own't, but I've the draw
> And better part o't."

In the autumn of 1888 and of one or two succeeding years, Brown returned to Ayr Academy and rendered some assistance to the rector, during the period of six weeks between the beginning of the school session and that of the University classes. His initiation of the boys into the real spirit of Homer was masterly and complete. In point of exact scholarship his teaching may have lacked in didactic quality, but he translated with such sympathy and verve that none could escape the infection of his enthusiasm.

During the session 1888-9, Brown took out the Logic and English classes in the Arts course, and also attended the Honours

class in Greek. Logic and Philosophy never had much attraction for him, and his work in the Logic class, under Professor Veitch, calls for no comment. In the Senior English class, under Professor Nichol, he stood well in class exercises and examinations, and he ran a Mr. A. D. Blacklock very hard for the first place. At the end of the session he carried off the second prize. In everything, except verse compositions, he secured the highest marks possible.

In this session, the Greek chair was occupied by Professor Murray, in succession to Professor Sir Richard Jebb, and when Brown took up his work in the Honours class, he at once attracted the attention of his new teacher. "George Douglas Brown," writes Professor Murray, "was not essentially, I think, a scholar; his mind was of another type. Yet such was the general force and

artistic power of his intellect, he was certainly the best or second best of the classical undergraduates in Glasgow at the time of my first arrival there as professor. If I may characterise his work more particularly, I should say it was marked by very remarkable vigour of mind, together with a sort of impatience and irregularity—the qualities that often accompany an artistic temperament. He was the reverse of plodding or punctilious. He worked furiously hard for long spells; sat up late, read fast and voraciously, and remembered what he had read. I recollect once thinking it impossible that he could have read through a certain book—Harrison's 'Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens'—in the time that he had had it, amounting to a few hours. I asked him some questions, and found he remembered it as accurately as I did. I

had spent several days over it. At other times, when the mood changed, he was startlingly lazy."

Part of the long vacation in 1889 was spent with Professor Murray at Castle Howard, in Yorkshire. "On the occasion when Brown stayed with us in Yorkshire, during the summer vacation, to work up his classical composition," continues Professor Murray, "I was at first greatly disappointed in his work. I had expected him to work extra hard, and he seemed hardly to work at all. He was a charming companion, with his straight look and sunny smile, and vigorous and original views on all manner of things. There was something manly and truth-loving about his intellect. Every one liked him in the house. But just at the moment he seemed unable to work! He was intoxicated with the summer, and used to lie

for hours in a boat, sometimes with books, and sometimes without. I have no doubt whatever that his mind was really hard at work, thinking and recuperating all the while."

At Castle Howard, the social atmosphere was an entirely new one for Brown, and his "intoxication" may have been the partial result of finding himself in the lap of luxury for a spell. There was humour and ingenuousness in his writing home at the time, in description of his novel surroundings, that he had to take "shameless hussies" in to dinner: there was the dogged self-satisfaction of the Scot in his declaration that he would "as soon have his kail through the reek at Drumsmudden."

At the opening of the session 1889-90, Brown obtained the Stewart Bursary of £15, tenable during the gown course, and in

that year he completed the Arts curriculum by taking out the classes in Moral Philosophy, under Professor Edward Caird (now Master of Balliol) and in Natural Philosophy, under Professor Sir William Thomson—now Lord Kelvin. As has been noted already, philosophy had no great attraction for Brown, but throughout the session there was a steady improvement in the quality of his work in Moral Philosophy, both in examinations and class exercises, with the result that he attained a position near the top of the second division of the class. Of his work for Lord Kelvin's class, no record has been traced, but it is not likely that pure science would fare any better than did metaphysical science, in the interest of one whose instincts were wholly biassed towards the artistic in literature.

Having reached the conclusion of his gown course in 1890, Brown presented himself for examination in Arts, and graduated Master of Arts, with first-class honours in Classics.

In the same year Brown carried off the Eglinton Fellowship of £100 per annum, tenable for three years, after examination open to deserving students who had taken the degree of Master of Arts at the immediately preceding term. This fellowship made it obligatory upon him to follow a course of study in the University, or give assistance in the teaching work there. He also carried off the Cowan Gold Medal for excellence in Greek, as the result of success in the quaint ceremonial ordeal of the Blackstone Examination.

In conformity with the conditions of his Fellowship, Brown returned to Glasgow

University for the session 1890-1, and took up an Honours course in Greek as well as a special course in Latin Prose Composition, which had always been the weakest point in his classical scholarship.

For part of the session, too, Brown acted as assistant to Professor Murray, in consequence of the death of the regular class assistant. "He of course did his teaching work well," writes Professor Murray, "but one felt that he was not cut out for anything in the shape of a schoolmaster. The clock-like regularity that comes naturally to some men, and is so necessary in the teaching of a Scottish University, was evidently a matter of considerable effort to him."

In 1891 the Luke Historical Prize of £10 fell to Brown in a biennial competitive examination upon general subjects connected

with ancient Greek and Roman history and literature. In that year, also, he won the blue ribbon of Glasgow University, the Snell Exhibition.

"The Snell," as it is called, is a foundation dating from the seventeenth century, and carries with its £130 a year for three years an obligation upon the holder to reside and study at Balliol College, Oxford. The original intention of the founder was that intelligent young Scotsmen should be drafted from Glasgow University to Oxford for the purpose of being indoctrinated in the teachings and practice of the Episcopal form of the Christian religion. Snell scholars were bound over to enter Holy Orders, and thereafter to return to Scotland, where they should remain as Episcopalian priests during the rest of their natural life—"to propagate Episcopacy," as an old account has it. The

pious, if proselytising, intentions of the founder have been abrogated in our more catholic times, but the exhibition remains, and the exhibitioner must still go to Oxford to enjoy its benefits. Brown surrendered his Eglinton Fellowship, set out for Oxford, and Glasgow University knew him no more.

Scholar at Oxford, 1891-5

CHAPTER IV

SCHOLAR AT OXFORD, 1891–5

GEORGE BROWN matriculated at Balliol College, Oxford, on October 20th, 1891, and for the next four years—that is, until 1895—Oxford was the official centre of his scholastic life.

As is pretty generally known, students at Oxford qualify for the degree of Bachelor of Arts by reading, with tutors and independently, in preparation for two principal examinations—"Moderations," usually taken in the second year, and "Greats" or "Final Schools," at the close of the curriculum.

Mr. J. L. Strachan Davidson, Senior Dean

of Balliol College, and the late Mr. Evelyn Abbott were the tutors who supervised the greater part of Brown's studies. In the eyes of his teachers, the general quality of Brown's work displayed "good sense and intelligence." One of his tutors reported at first that he was rather "dull," but afterwards came to entertain a more favourable opinion. Another tutor's report characterised him as "ambitious, but lacking knowledge of his books." In Classical Moderations in 1893 Brown took a high place in the first class. When the Final Schools, *Literæ Humaniores*, came on in May, 1895, he was unwell on the day of examination, and did not present himself in the morning. The Master, however, sent for him, and pressed him to sit for examination in the afternoon. This he did, and his work qualified him for a third class; had he sat for the

whole examination, he might, in the Master's opinion, have taken a good second class.

Brown did not take much interest in athletics in general, and his near-sightedness prevented his enjoying many games. He played hockey sometimes at Oxford, but he considered walking to be the best exercise in the world. Many a day when he felt depressed or had an attack of indigestion, he would set his face towards the country, and tramp hour after hour, until he felt that he had regained tone.

A favourite recreation of Brown's at Oxford was the reading of trashy books. "For days he would lie on his sofa, when the weather was bad, reading all the yellow-backs he could lay hands on. Suddenly he would rouse himself, and go in for a tremendous bout of work, or take part in University life by joining fiercely in some

debate at one of the societies to which he belonged."

For many men Oxford life and collegiate study is a source of indefinable stimulus and inspiration. The classic traditions of the place, with its twenty-five colleges, many of them hoary with the weathering of centuries, and persisting witnesses to the intellectual strivings of countless generations of students and scholars, provide an ideal environment for work. The intimate academic relations of dons and undergraduates foster the continuity of the traditional Oxford point of view and Oxford manner, worth little in themselves, perhaps, but corresponding in the intellectual world to the "good breeding" that we like to meet with in the social sphere. Not least potent of Oxford privileges, the collegiate life of the undergraduates—with its unique facilities for the

formation of congenial friendships, for the development of well-balanced ideas of life "and things," as well as for its physical value on the athletic side—does much to make men of the raw boys who come up in their hundreds as "freshmen" in successive years.

Much of this inspiration seems to have been missed by Brown; partly because he was four years ahead of most of his fellow-students, both in age and in scholarship; principally, we fear, because his Snell Exhibition of £130 did not cover the somewhat expensive "battels" and other dues, and he had little else to rely upon financially. A note from Professor Murray is pertinent to these two points. "I was not surprised when he once complained to me bitterly of the weariness he felt in the classical work at Oxford. He had been so many years

at what seemed to him just the same old subjects, always taking in, always learning old lessons. He wanted to be at real work, to give out or create. . . . One little thing I remember, which was rather characteristic. When he went to Oxford, I offered to supplement his scholarship by a small sum: he had told me something of his circumstances at the time. He looked me straight in the eyes, rather sternly, and said, 'I'll pay ye back!' No word of thanks, and no hesitation; just a straight, manly look, and a friendly acceptance."

When Brown first went up to Oxford, he lived in residence at college for three or four terms. His rooms were in the Garden Quadrangle, on a staircase which at the time was almost monopolised by scholars and exhibitioners. Brown's set was on the ground floor. "They were

perhaps the most inconvenient rooms in Balliol, but they had the advantage of being cheap. From sheer poverty, he moved out of college into lodgings in his second year," and there is a further evidence of his narrow circumstances in the fact that he left Oxford without graduating, although he had passed all the examinations qualifying for the Bachelor of Arts degree.

In any aggregation of thoughtless youths there are always those who do not understand, and affect to disdain a "rough and ready sort of chap" like Brown, especially when he has the impertinence to be poor and live in their neighbourhood. A gang of these youngsters proceeded to Brown's rooms one day, purposing to "rag" them. They thought better of their intention, however, when they found Brown within, and he threw off his coat and threatened

to treat the foremost aggressor to a round of fisticuffs, Ayrshire fashion.

Of Brown's relations with his fellow-students at Oxford, an intimate friend of later days writes as follows:—

"While he hardly ever spoke of them by name, several figures stand out vividly in my mind as he would describe their narrowness, their mincing way of approaching their subject, or the blatant yet healthy 'cockiness' of the freshman. It must always be remembered that Brown was older than the average of these men. He had already come into his manhood. He knew human nature pretty well—as far as men were concerned—and no doubt his quick, biting retorts and speeches would make him unpopular with young, intellectual men. Had they been able to get within the outer barrier of his nature, they would have

found in him sympathetic and congenial comradeship."

Brown used to tell against himself a good story of his Oxford days. Dr. Jowett was still Master of Balliol when the young exhibitioner first went up to Oxford, and one day he asked him to a breakfast to which James Anthony Froude, among others, had been invited. Brown had not taken much part in the conversation, when Froude turned to Jowett and said: "Our young friend over there is strangely like our old friend ——." Then, after eating several mouthfuls, he again glanced at Brown with a reflective air, and added: "You know, Jowett, we always used to say that —— was the ugliest man we knew."

As a sequel to the foregoing record of the outstanding facts of Brown's curriculum, the reader will welcome an intimate sketch

of his personal student life at Oxford. Mr. H. W. C. Davis writes :—

"Brown bore his poverty with a light heart, and during his first year he had a good deal of such society as attracted him. He did not by any means confine himself to the company of the scholars. The reading man, as such, bored him ; and although he was never tired of discussing literature with any one who had a real interest in it, he was almost equally fond of finding his way into a card-party or some such gathering. He would not play cards if he could help it, but established himself in a corner of the room, from which he hurled jokes and anecdotes broadcast among his company. His means prevented him from entertaining much, but at tea-time one would often find his room full to overflowing, and Brown engaged in a wordy duel with a bosom

friend, while the others listened. When he was launched on a discussion, he sooner or later fell into one of his two characteristic attitudes. Either he would stand on the hearthrug, with his legs far apart, gesticulating strenuously, and perhaps wielding a teapot or a poker; or he would ensconce himself in the inmost recesses of his armchair, place his feet on the mantelpiece, and argue over his shoulder to any one who challenged him.

"His conversation was discursive. He had no taste for close discussion at that time, whatever may have been the case in his later life. I imagine that he had never been bitten with the taste for dialectic. At all events, he had shaken it off before he appeared in Balliol. If his verdict on an author was questioned, he would reply by quoting a sentence or a phrase which had

struck him as particularly good, or irretrievably inept. Of philosophical subjects he was rather impatient. They did not appeal to him, and, being considerably older than most of us, he realised the emptiness of the discussions in which we indulged, and on which, I believe, we rather prided ourselves at that time. He thought that Oxford philosophy was a matter of technical terms, and altogether divorced from reality. He often intimated to me that his real ambition was to apprehend and to describe things as they seem, not to speculate about their ultimate nature.

"So far as I know, he wrote very little while he was in Oxford; but he showed me one or two prose sketches of which he was rather proud, and with good reason. They were descriptive, for the most part; and, oddly enough, showed no trace of the

dramatic faculty. That he had a keen eye for character, and could produce brilliant dialogue if he liked, was well known to his friends. But he showed this faculty chiefly in anecdotes which he improvised with extraordinary ease. I remember that the speakers in these anecdotes always talked broad Ayrshire.

"There were two societies to which Brown and I belonged for a good while. The one was a College literary debating club called the Arnold. It contained from thirty to forty members, and met once a week after the College Hall. Brown attended it with some regularity for his first two years. Afterwards, he was rarely to be seen, unless there was an opportunity of making fun out of private business. He was President for one term, and his speeches were brilliant, when he chose that they

should be. But he was troubled by a throat affection which made speaking difficult to him, and he detested the trouble of preparation. He was more at home in the Milton, a University literary society composed of senior men, which was at that time largely recruited from Balliol. In both societies his views on literature brought him into violent conflict with other members. Impressionism was not in fashion, and I remember that a paper which he read on Keats gave rise to a stormy debate in the Arnold. I had the misfortune to collide with him in both societies; but it was not the least of his good qualities that he never bore malice for an attack upon his opinions, however much he may have been irritated at the time. I have known him get up and go out in the course of a debate, slamming the door after him with unnecessary

emphasis. But these ebullitions occurred at a time when his nerves were unsettled, and they never lasted long. He suffered greatly from sleeplessness, and it was no uncommon thing for us, coming back late at night from some convivial reunion, to find him tramping up and down the quadrangle in the hope of inducing drowsiness. To this cause were chiefly due the fits of apathy and depression from which he suffered with increasing frequency as his college course went on.

"But there were other causes. He had little sympathy with the curriculum to which he found himself tied down. The man who reads for *Literæ Humaniores* in Oxford is expected to spend the first eighteen months of his time over pure scholarship. To Brown, classical composition was an intolerable nuisance; and he resented the

necessity of treating the classics as an exercise in grammar. He had read widely before he came up, and had a genuine enthusiasm for one or two classical poets: Homer, Catullus, and Juvenal are three whom he used to quote. On the rare occasions when he showed himself inside a lecture-room, he considered that his time had been well spent if he picked up a happy rendering for a line or phrase which he admired. But he could not bring himself to read unlimited quantities of Cicero and Demosthenes. He made up his mind as to the minimum amount of reading which would get him a First in Moderations, and ploughed through it in seven or eight weeks. It was a great feat. He worked almost continuously the whole day and every day, only submitting occasionally to be dragged out for a hurried walk.

"After he had obtained his First, his friends expected that he would settle down to the study of Plato and Aristotle for his Final Examination. But he never did so. Plato appealed to him as literature, and I fancy that in a discursive way he read rather more modern philosophy than he allowed his friends to know. But he was a sworn enemy to systems, and what reading he did in his third and fourth years was chiefly in English poetry and novels.

"He used to maintain at this time, with great vigour of language, that he was wasting his time, and ought never to have come to Oxford. As to the course which he ought to have taken he was less definite. He sometimes expressed a wish to write; but if he formed any definite literary plans, or made up his mind what form of literature would best suit his powers, I never heard of it.

The sketches which I have mentioned above were avowedly experiments. It may, however, be worth noticing that he expressed an intense admiration for Tourguenieff as a literary artist. There is a certain resemblance between Brown's best-known novel and those in which Tourguenieff analyses the Russian national character in the course of telling a simple and realistic story.

"Even allowing that Brown's last two years in Oxford were a period of incubation, I think it is true that they would have been better spent elsewhere. The climate did not suit him. He was prevented from working on the lines to which he was naturally drawn, by the feeling that his first duty was to take a good degree, and so justify his position as an exhibitioner. At the same time, he could not bring himself to take any interest in the 'Greats' curriculum.

Possibly he might have roused himself in the last three months before his examination, as he had done for Moderations. But his mother's death, occurring in his last vacation, was a severe blow to him. He was terribly depressed during his last few weeks in Oxford, suffered from insomnia, and could only with difficulty be induced to finish his examination. He omitted at least one paper, and only obtained a third class.

"When one looks back on this part of Brown's life, there is little to remember with pleasure. He was in the depths, and I for one could quite believe him when he said, as he sometimes did, that it was on the whole the most miserable part of his life. A successful Oxford career would not have done much to develop his genius; but the sense of failure and inability to accommodate himself to the conditions of Oxford work

was a continual clog upon his mind. At this time, just as much as in his first two years, he gave the impression of being a man who had it in him to do great things. And, however depressed he might be, there was in him a native geniality and kindliness which made him the best of friends and companions. A stranger might think him rough and brusque; and he was decidedly the opposite of expansive, to those whom he was meeting for the first or second time. But in essentials he was the most courteous of men, and I have often been struck by the respect which he showed for scruples, prejudices, and beliefs for which he had little sympathy. He never hurt a man's feelings in cold blood, though in fits of irritation he sometimes said things for which he was afterwards sorry. His humour was delightful, because it was never ill-natured.

Some people might have found his conversation too Rabelaisian for their taste. But there was nothing morbid, unhealthy, or prurient, in his talk at any time. And one felt that he was at bottom high-minded and chivalrous, with a good deal of the old Puritanic leaven in his composition. He judged his own conduct and that of others by a singularly high standard."

Before closing the present chapter, we may deal shortly with events which occurred in Brown's family circle during his Oxford years. First of these, in point of time, was the eviction of his father from Drumsmudden in 1892.

The sub-factor put old Brown out of his farm, on the plea that he was too old to keep it in order, but, Drumsmudden and others believed that his action was not entirely disinterested. It is conceded on

all hands that it was a libel to say that Drumsmudden was not a good farmer. When he got his farm in 1861, it was "like a field of rashes," and during the thirty-two years of his tenancy he gradually brought the whole of it under cultivation; yet at the age of eighty-two he had to go out. The action of the factor Mr. Reid was most unpopular, and on March 18th, 1892, a large gathering of people assembled at the farm by torchlight, "carrying the effigy of a gentleman whom they named a 'Scots Landlord's Evicting Machine.'" A bonfire was built, and the effigy was ignominiously burned in it.

Drumsmudden had a mind of his own—one that would sway for no one; and the origin of his difference with the factor had been his refusal to vote Tory. Reid was a Tory, and arrived one day at the time of a General Election to secure Drum-

smudden's vote for the candidate whom he himself favoured. The two men met in the farmyard, and Reid stated his errand. Drumsmudden looked at him keenly for a moment, his wrath kindling the while. Then he said: "Come this way, Geordie, man," taking him to a point whence he could get a full view of the country from Drumsmudden to Ochiltree, where the polling was to take place. There he continued: "You see the road the craw flees to Ochiltree; I will go by that way, and vote according to my opinion: for no landlord nor his bit of clay would I sell my opinion." The factor retired discomfited; but Drumsmudden's eviction must have given him some satisfaction.

George Brown took up the cudgels for his father, and inspired several letters to the *Ayrshire Post* on the subject; but there

was no redress, and the old man had to realise his stock and quit the farm when the term day came. He took the farm of West Newton, in the parish of Loudoun. But the untimely death of his son James made it inconvenient for him to continue his farming operations, and he retired, after two years, first to Cumnock, and latterly to Ochiltree.

At some period of each of the long vacations, George Brown found his way from Oxford to his native place. There, at many a farmer's fireside, "he made heartsome company, with his stories and experiences." Ever the same kindly, homely fellow, he would put on his shabbiest suit of clothes, and turn his hand to any odd job in which his help would be acceptable. One of his oldest friends in Ochiltree tells of his once dropping in

at her house in a most untidy condition of dress, having just quitted some work on his mother's potato patch. She told him never to come to her house again in that garb. Next day he called at the same house dressed point-device, with straw hat, gloves, and cane. Ringing the bell, and asking for the lady of the house in Oxford English, he made a formal call, and at first completely mystified mistress and maid as to his identity.

With his former school companions and cronies, Brown was ever on the same good terms, affecting no superior airs by reason of his University experiences. One who knew him well in these days writes:

"Many happy days we spent together at his father's farm in our native parish. Had 'Geordie,' as he was familiarly called, not been fortunate enough to have had a

University education, he would still have been a genius. He was born one. He was certainly the best conversationalist it has been my lot to meet, and in manner and action he was nothing if not original; he was originality personified. He was void of pride, and detested it in another; fops kept clear of him, for he was down on them straight; his sarcasm was truly withering. One never tired of his company, and, if you could talk of books and authors, he never tired of yours. He could quote Burns and Shakespeare for any length of time; and I have heard him giving a sermon out of nothing that would have done credit to the ablest divine.

"Geordie was never exactly sure what profession he would turn to after his college career was over, but I think he had always

a great desire to be what he ultimately became—a great writer."

Brown kept up a correspondence with home, too, throughout his University career. On one occasion he sent a small present from Oxford to his sister Maggie, and, the better to secure its safe delivery, he wrote upon the outside cover the following injunction to the Ochiltree letter-carrier, who had more than once betrayed a suspiciously intimate knowledge of village correspondence :—

"Noo, Jamie lad, keep mind and tak' it,
And dinnie ye a blister mak' o't,
Or, by the Lord, I'll raise a racket
That may surprise ye;
So tentily guide and guard this packet,
As I advise ye."

Brown closed his Oxford days under the shadow of a great bereavement. His beloved mother's health gave way in the spring of 1895, and he spent the Easter vacation in faithfully and tenderly assisting

in nursing her during the mortal course of her illness, returning to Oxford for his "Greats" a few days after her death and funeral. Little wonder that he was sick in body and mind when the final ordeal of his Oxford days came upon him.

In his later days, Brown was wont to maintain that his years at Oxford had been thrown away. "I played the fool," he said more than once. None the less, Oxford had left its impress upon him. It was not inconsistent with his dissatisfaction with the educational drudgery of Oxford that he yet entertained a warm side to his Southron Alma Mater: she had left her mark on his heart. She had left her mark on his manner as well, although its tokens—ease, elegance, and moderation in statement—were not, on the surface, outstanding characteristics of the man.

Journalism and Letters in London

CHAPTER V

JOURNALISM AND LETTERS IN LONDON

QUITTING Oxford in the summer of 1895, Brown settled almost immediately in London, with the determination to make a livelihood by his pen. Various paragraphists will have it that he took steps towards qualifying for the English Bar, but there is not the slightest justification for the statement. Circumstances over which he had no control had put from him all idea of adopting the teaching profession—an idea that he had certainly entertained nebulously for a time—and in view of Professor Murray's skilled opinion, quoted

in a previous chapter, there is no reason for regret that he abandoned the project. As a matter of fact, offers of work as a teacher were declined by him at the time that he first came to London. No, he had made up his mind to devote his life to the pursuits of a man of letters, and by the love he bore for literature he was called to be a novelist.

There was imagination and a vaulting ambition in Brown's purpose, for his external advantages and opportunities were *nil*. When a man comes to London from Oxford, he has usually a well-defined path along which he has only to pursue his ideal and reach his goal. If he is going to the Bar, he enters one of the inns of court, eats his dinners, devils for a qualified barrister, and in due course he arrives—or fails. If he seeks a livelihood in journalism,

he has usually a place secured for him by influence on one of the numerous important journals of the metropolis, and makes a beginning that is many removes nearer to the editorial chair than is that of the practical journalist who has started at the reporter's desk. He, too, arrives—or fails. If he covets the more elusive fortunes and more subtle delights of "literature," he has at his back a decent income derived from independent sources; he may take his time, and feel his way to the particular *métier* that will most suit his tastes and his intellectual inclinations and gifts; and in due course, if he has it in him, he finds his publisher and his public and "arrives." But for George Brown there was no assured pathway to qualifications and success, Oxford man though he was.

Deprived of the advantages enjoyed by

his more fortunate Oxford friends, Brown set himself to keep the pot boiling by means of journalism. He would not tie himself down to the routine of a salaried appointment upon any particular journal, but chose to adopt the more untrammelled if precarious occupation of free-lance journalism—here an article, there a poem, here a short story, there a book review. It is not proposed to trace here with any exactness the story of Brown's journalistic life, but a few facts are cited to enable the reader to comprehend more vividly the nature of the struggle to which he addressed himself.

At the outset, Brown's college acquaintance with Mr. J. D. Symon provided an *entrée* into actual journalism. As sub-editor of *The Illustrated London News*, Mr. Symon was able to put him in the way of book-

reviewing and similar work. Later, when Mr. Symon became editor of this journal, it began to be a sort of stand-by. Not only did Brown review pretty constantly for it, but for a number of years he went to the *News* office on one day in the week, and wrote any paragraphs that might be required as "fill-ups."

In 1898 Brown had the fortune to have an article on Burns accepted by *Blackwood's Magazine*. Mr. Blackwood was so favourably impressed by the quality of the paper that he wrote to Brown asking him to go and see him in Edinburgh. But he had no journalistic ambition, and he never availed himself of this opportunity to obtain a footing among the contributors to a periodical of the premier quality of *Maga*. The acceptance of his first story by *The Success* was more fruitful, for through the

introduction of the editor of this short-lived venture he ultimately obtained the post of reader to the publishing house by which his novel was afterwards brought out.

In 1899 a powerful short story, written over the pen-name of "Kennedy King," and entitled "How Janet Goudie came Home," was accepted by Sir Wemyss Reid for *The Speaker*. One of the finest things Brown ever wrote, it attracted the attention of the British representative of one of the great American monthlies, who invited him to submit contributions of the same kind. There is an example of Brown's unpracticalness in the fact that, in response, he sent a poem instead of a story. The poem was not accepted, and he made no further effort to take advantage of the opportunity offered to him. In 1899, also, Brown undertook regular employment as sub-editor as well

as contributor to *Sandow's Magazine*. He was responsible for several articles that appeared in its columns on such subjects as "Walt Whitman," "The Strong Man in Dumas's Fiction," "The Strength of Porthos," and the like.

The incidents that we have just quoted go to show that Brown could have found a wide market for the fruit of his journalistic efforts; but, as Mr. Charles Whibley has said, "though from the first he depended upon his pen for support, he never confused literature and journalism. Journalism was to him a trade to be quietly followed for the profit it might bring. He took no more pride than that of the honest craftsman in what he wrote for the papers, and he did not desire, like the most of his colleagues, to win fame for his journey work."

On September 28th, 1897, Brown's father died. It is interesting to know that in discussing the terms of his will with an intimate friend shortly before his death, and before, as yet, George Brown had achieved any marked success in his calling, the old man said: "I'm not going to leave anything to George. I gave him a good education, and spent more on him than I shall be able to leave to each of the girls. I saw there was something in him; he carries the fortune I have given him. He'll make a mark some day."

In the course of an article in *The Bookman*, reprinted in the present volume, by his kind permission, Mr. Andrew Melrose has given the story of a literary partnership into which Brown entered with two friends, some time after he came to London. Of the more intimate side of the relations of

"The Triumvirate" Mr. Melrose has told all that it is expedient to tell. But some account of the more public manifestations of this brotherhood of three may be of biographical value.

An interest in literature as literature was the original bond of sympathy and union, and this found expression in other ways than mere discussion. A firm of publishers and literary agents was started, and its concerns cost Brown many an anxious thought, and stimulated him to formulate half a dozen projects for the production of "essential stuff." Some of these came off, and some did not. He wrote, for instance, a shilling volume entitled "Famous Fighting Regiments," under the pen-name of "George Hood," and this was duly published. He projected, but never carried into execution, a scheme for the publication of inexpensive

but tasteful reprints of such classics as Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare," desiderating for each of these volumes the addition of distinctive and illuminative introductions—"one packed and pregnant paragraph would do the trick." He projected a translation of the "Lettres d'un Innocent" by Dreyfus, but that, too, never appeared. He projected—and would that he had gone on with the project!—"A Guide to the Burns Country," written "with a literary flavour," and filled with much local anecdote and reminiscences of interesting literary figures who have been in the Burns country. He suggested the commissioning of a book upon a subject relating to the "intensification" of the British Empire. He desiderated that this should be written with the informing idea of a lofty conception of the British Empire as a great intellectual and material force;

and that the writing must be touched with a noble emotion for the Empire, and be vivid and stirring, so as to "get home." The work should be illuminated by a large and generous philosophy. Its topics should not be discussed meanly, as subjects entirely by themselves, but should be related to first principles and pregnant generalisations on life and history, above them and subtending them. By this treatment he designed to secure depth, and richness, and philosophy, and, consequently, a permanent value for the book.

From our point of view, perhaps the most important manifestation of "The Triumvirate" was the biographical study of Mr. Kruger. The receipt of certain exclusive matter, as journalists would call it, suggested the idea of a "Life" of Mr. Kruger. It was agreed that "George Douglas" and

another of "The Triumvirate" should write and work in collaboration, and a commission was secured from *The Morning Leader*, who purchased the book and serial rights for a round sum down. The crux was that the work was wanted at once, for serial issue in the *feuilleton* of the paper. Of the collaborators, Brown alone could command the time and detachment necessary, and in the end he wrote the whole book, only discussing the subject-matter in sections with his collaborator, as the work progressed.

Although the author found his "saliences" ham-strung by the squeamish press corrections of an editor over careful for the susceptibilities of his readers, the "Kruger" still possesses vital interest as a biographical study of a man whose psychal phenomena have puzzled many people. Brown was so thorough-going an Imperialist that he had

no fear of being branded as a pro-Boer, and spoke quite recently of having the work brought out in book form.

We fear that these earlier years in London brought for Brown little less financial struggle than he had already experienced during his student days. Putting everything together, journalism and minor literary work afforded him a sufficient average income to tide him over the immediate necessities of life. This quite satisfied him; but owing to the irregularity of payment for his work, he was often without a penny or a postage stamp in his pocket. When he had money, it was ever at the service of those whose need was, for the moment, more urgent than his own. An old friend, who had known him from his earliest years, "often told him that he would never make money, as he always gave away what he had." During

the period dealt with in the present chapter, most of Brown's acquaintances, realising that he had been away from Oxford for a number of years, and was still "loafing" without any settled position, and without ever having done anything to justify himself, had a feeling that he was not going to "come off." For many such people he was always "poor Brown."

Pressure of circumstances notwithstanding, Brown's bright nature rose above all obstacles. "He literally bubbled over with cheerfulness. He was the life and soul of a company." He could subscribe his letters with such facetious pen-names as "Goggles," "Giglamps," or "The Budding Author." And yet there was a certain impatience and even irritability in his temperament; he inherited his father's volcanic temper. He could not bear restraint of any kind,

and, for instance, he hated to be questioned as to where he had been or what he had been doing.

A hard life, with an element of retarded success in it, sometimes makes a man misanthropic. But Brown's heart throbbed with a full sympathy, and he entered into the joys and sorrows of others in a most unaffected manner. "Dreyfus," he once said, "is a man of very strong family affection—did you see the telegram of yesterday, addressed to his wife? 'I await with joy the moment of kissing you.' What a moment it will be to the two! He used to write to his little boy to be sure to teach his baby sister how to build 'those card houses which you and I built together, and which used to come tumbling down so gloriously.'" That touch in itself, he continued, was enough to show that Dreyfus

had a kind and simple heart. Brown himself was greatly interested in children. He did not play with them, but their little ways did not bore him, and they were always fond of him.

Even when he contemplated his fellow-creatures in the mass, Brown's outlook was optimistic and gentle. While he stayed at Bayswater, for instance, he took pleasure in observing women of the middle class, as they moved about, doing their daily shopping. They suggested to him the idea of cheerful family circles—of affectionate daughters and strapping sons. He was always on the watch for the vision of true homes, and maintained that the world was much better than people thought it. One of his intimates puts it :—

"One could almost imagine two Browns —the country Brown and the town Brown.

The town Brown knew nothing of women. They were an unexplored land to him, but the country Brown knew something of womanhood, as represented by the healthy country lass—the incarnation of motherhood to come—placid, pure, strong to suffer, and content to grant man his superiority."

Before passing from the subject of Brown's attitude to his fellows, we may note that there was a certain intense quality in the intimacy he sought and gave when he had taken a friend to his heart. One writes of "the long talk by the firelight, the dogs curled up around us. Every now and then his hand would be stretched out and grasp mine, and his somewhat harsh voice would become tender, as he said: 'It's great; it's great,' or, 'It's worth everything else.'"

Bachelor life in London depends very much upon the landlady for its comfort.

"During Brown's London life, he had a varied experience of landladies, an experience that would take a lot of beating, but they all seem to have treated him well, according to their lights. His peasant life in Scotland had made him familiar with all sides of household work, and he was able to talk to them interestedly and sympathetically of their troubles. While some stood in awe of him, they were all genuinely sorry when he left." A contributor to a Scottish periodical tells of a call at Brown's lodgings in London. Brown was absent, but the visitor "got into conversation with his landlady, and she was literally brimming over with his praises. She said that the like of him never sat at a landlady's table—so cheery, so considerate, and so much of a gentleman."

London, as London, made a distinct appeal

to Brown. He "felt the call of London tingling through his veins." "Many a time," writes Mr. Howard Spicer, "after a glorious day of perfect contentment in the woods and the meadows, on gaining once again the top of a 'bus, his eyes have lighted up, the dull roar of the traffic coming as music to him as he would exclaim: 'Ah, there is only one place in the world to live in!'" He took a special delight in the public parks. He knew of spots of absolute seclusion, green glades with no fear of disturbance—and all around the roar of London. He would wander there at all hours of the day and night, and he once mentioned incidentally that one night he had jumped into the Regent's Park Canal, at twelve o'clock, in the effort to rescue a young girl who had thrown herself into the water with suicidal purpose.

In these years, Brown's journalistic and other occupations were all kept subordinate to one principal purpose in life—"he kept steadily in view his fixed determination to do well in literature." "He was always a sedulous reader," Mr. Whibley has told us. "'I can read anything I ever came across,' he said, 'except algebra, the "Elements of Logic," and the speeches of the late Mr. Gladstone.' Thus, in Lord Bacon's phrase, he became 'a full man.' But, above all, he husbanded his talent. He did not fritter away his abilities in temporary and uncongenial toil. Though he possessed great energy of mind, he was at the same time a man of stern restraint. There was scarcely a subject upon which he did not hold a headstrong opinion, and, while in talk he would adorn the opinion with many embroideries, he never wished to dissipate his

energies by giving it expression in print. In other words, he was an artist, not a prophet. He preferred fitting himself for the real calling of letters to improving the taste or shaping the morals of his contemporaries."

Brown was ever ready to discuss the essentials of literature with those who were of like tastes. Of every vital book he demanded that it should abound in saliences, things that "leap at you from out the page." He laid great stress, too, upon an author's need to possess the power of automatic visualisation. He maintained that it was impossible to write essential stuff without the writer's having seen what he sought to describe. His main theory was that in novels (and it should be remembered that his expressed ambition, from the beginning, was to be a novelist) the characters

should be true to life. Notwithstanding this, he could enjoy pure romance, and spoke, for instance, of Maurice Hewlett's "Forest Lovers" with enthusiasm. He laid it down as a fundamental principle that, both in the drama represented on the stage and in that depicted in novels, characters should explain themselves in their actions, and not by explanatory "jawing."

Another article of Brown's literary creed was that before one can write the big book one must have the big thought; and he conceived that the big thought was inseparable from the spiritual conception of life and a belief in eternity. It is only when you get into the region of eternity that the "bands of circumstance" and the limitations of life are lost, and everything falls into proper and relative place, he might have put it. His definition of style had

the same idea. Great style he defined as "supernal thought, supernally expressed." There could be no great style without the great thought first.

In dealing with Brown's high ideal, it is perhaps pertinent to speak of his religion. That was decidedly of a pantheistic order. The idea of the personality of God may not have been objectionable to him, but the idea of God's immanence, in nature especially, had a fascination for him. As a matter of fact, he spoke commonly of certain emotions which nature's manifestations arouse as "physical pantheism."

Of Brown's literary method it may be said that he was an inveterate phrasemaker. He always carried a notebook, and kept constant record of phrases and ideas that occurred to him. His methods of work were irregular in the extreme. He would

not tie himself down to certain hours of work. He spent days and even weeks, in the summer, loafing in the London parks, doing absolutely nothing, so far as direct work was concerned. But although a loafer, he was not a mooner. He could not lie for a day on the hillside with a perfectly vacuous mind. He was constantly thinking on definite subjects. Often, after a day of loafing of this kind, he would come in at night to see a friend, and, almost without fail, his conversation would have some relation to a train of thought that had been started, or that he had been following that day, or on some other day. Every idea that came to Brown was surveyed by him with intellectual curiosity. He developed it into a theory. When he had got the theory complete, he put it down in his notebook.

In 1901 Brown took it into his head to

learn Italian, and within a month he was able to read an Italian novel. It is not known what his immediate incentive was. It could hardly have been foreign travel, for he only crossed the Channel twice, and his absences on the Continent did not extend beyond a grand total of five weeks. He did, however, occasionally express a hazy ambition to reside in Italy.

In 1899, under the pseudonym of "Kennedy King," Brown published his first work of fiction, a boys' book entitled "Love and a Sword." Written as a pot-boiler and to order, it attracted no notice, and its author evidently desired that it should be reckoned among his immature essays when he adopted his later pen-name of "George Douglas," in giving "The House with the Green Shutters" to the world. The existence of the earlier book has been made

public, however, and it is only right to record the fact here, in passing.

Having described Brown's journalistic and minor literary work, as well as his outlook upon life and literature in general, we proceed to some account of the novel by which he attained fame and distinction with meteoric suddenness.

"The House with the Green Shutters"

CHAPTER VI

"THE HOUSE WITH THE GREEN SHUTTERS"

MANY months before it appeared in public, Brown read over the original "House with the Green Shutters" to two friends. At that time the story would run to about twenty thousand words. Both his friends were strongly of opinion that there were in the story the potential plot and material for a proper novel. Upon their advice he withheld it from publication in its original form, and set to work to develop it. Gourlay and the Deacon were among the characters from the outset, and the plot

was never much changed. He worked at his book very leisurely, and from time to time reported progress to his friends, although he declined to accept any criticism —even of its title, which was thought unsuited to anything but a short story.

With a dedication to his old schoolmaster and lifelong friend, Mr. William Maybin, rector of the Ayr Academy, the book was published in Great Britain in October, 1901, and in America by Messrs. M'Clure, for whom it had been read by Mr. Charles Whibley.

By this time, most people are familiar with the plot of the novel. It depicts a small rural community in Scotland, in which John Gourlay, "a resolute dullard," the dominant character in the book, has succeeded in aggrandising himself by riding rough-shod over his neighbours, overreaching them in unscrupulous fashion, and "downing"

every one who stands between him and any enterprise from which he can hope to add even a few pounds to his pile of ill-gotten gain. He is the best-hated man in a place where all are good haters. Nemesis ultimately overtakes him. A newcomer establishes a rival business, and, by methods as reprehensible as those of Gourlay, and pursued with a cunning which Gourlay does not possess, gradually ruins him. Disappointed in his ambitions, and grim in his determination to play the game, he is driven in on his family, and finds no comfort in the last ditch. His wife is a "feckless" creature, and the two children whom she has borne him are weaklings. The daughter is "thowless," and far gone in consumption; the son is destitute of moral self-control, and has become a nervous wreck and a crapulous drunkard. From beginning to end, Gourlay

has a manner of speech that bites like vitriol. In the last phase, he baits his drunken son—who has run through a mint of money at college and then been ignominiously expelled for drunken insubordination—until his boy turns on him and murders him. The criminal cause of John Gourlay's death is concealed by his wife and daughter. But, before many days have expired, the murderer commits suicide, with the tacit consent of his mother; and finally, by the double suicide of mother and daughter, the name of Gourlay is cut off. The most gruesome feature of the whole tragic record is that there is not a soul in Barbie to lament its sequent disasters. The malignant village gossips and "bodies" only giggle and tee-hee as they note each stage in the collapse of John Gourlay's house of cards: it is a black terrible story.

The present writer does not find it necessary to make any attempt at criticism of the book, but he offers a few notes upon the origins of the author's materials. With some success, people have endeavoured to localise the scenes in the story, and to identify the characters; but part of the skill of the novelist has lain in the consummate manner in which he has constructed places and characters from material derived from very various sources.

There is no such community of lost souls and incarnate fiends as was Barbie, but Brown once acknowledged that the external features of the place were made up of a combination of New Cumnock, Sanquhar, and Ochiltree; while, for the name itself, it may be suggested that he adopted a modification of the name of his uncle's college in Paris.

In the same way, Brown drew upon an extensive and intimate knowledge of Scots south-country people, without reproducing any of them with photographic accuracy. In some features, the character of Gourlay corresponds with that of a man who was at one time called the "village king" of Ochiltree; but in many respects it does not correspond with the story concerning this person, and there have been other individuals who possessed one or more of Gourlay's unenviable idiosyncrasies. So it is with all the characters. The power of the book lies partly in the fact that, up and down Scotland, people recognise the savage qualities of Barbie as existent in this or the other country town of whose inner life they happen to have some familiar knowledge.

For the emphatic vocabularies of his

characters, Brown drew largely upon that of his own father. Such words as "splurge," "browdened," "bluff," "spume and surge," such phrases as "a fuff in the pan," and "a child on the brisket," are recognised as having been distinctively Drumsmudden's, while the ejaculation "I'll gar your brains jaup red to the heavens" was a verbatim quotation from one of his outbursts of verbal wrath. In the same way an individual who used the irritating phrase, "Maybe, I dare say," with wearisome iteration, was an inhabitant of Ochiltree.

The weak spots which have most provoked unfavourable criticism of the book on the part of the reviewers and others are the impossibility of Barbie in all its blackness, the shaky tectonics incident to the introduction of awkward and arid patches of moralising commentary—the very

"jawing" that Brown himself condemned when he discussed the theory of novel-writing—and the anachronism of a good deal of the slang used by the characters. In all other respects, "The House with the Green Shutters" has won unstinted praise for its author. The vivid word-painting of scenes and scenery, the convincing and distinctive delineation of character, and the dramatic intensity and impetus of the narrative have marked the book as one that stands apart from the common crowd of novels, and takes a foremost place among the fiction of artistic quality.

The author was quite well aware of the ferocity of his book. More than once, while he was still writing it, he expressed a fear that the story was taking too strong a hold upon him. "It's becoming terribly brutal," he would say. "People will get a false

impression of my point of view. I wonder if it's not a shame to write such a savage book?" Many hailed Brown's novel as a shrewd blow at the "Kailyard School." "I love the book for just this, it sticks the Kailyarders like pigs," says Professor Raleigh, for instance. The "Kailyard School" made the Scots appear as a race of sentimentalists, and men of deep and general piety, and indirectly Brown's book did give the lie to this one-sided presentment; but the real aim of its savage and grim picture of Scottish life and character was somewhat different. This aim has been put very tersely by a correspondent of the *Ayr Advertiser*, who writes on the matter from the intimate point of view. He says:—

"It was not written because he hated the Kailyard School, though all cheap pathos

was most distasteful to him; not because he had a 'distorted view of humanity,' as I have seen it said somewhere; not because his outlook on life was gloomy. He viewed life with absolutely hopeful eyes, seeing good in everything and every one, though never blind to flaws. And 'The House with the Green Shutters' was written as it was, partly because he considered the ordinary cut-and-dried style of fiction wrong —that a book should be a living thing, not a mechanism, stiffly moving and hampered by the garments of convention; he wrote the end first, and became enamoured of his figures—and, alas! he knew that in some lives there is an inevitableness of disaster. These are some reasons, and in his own words: 'I wrote it so cruelly, because I hate the cruel scandal that misinterprets poor human beings. I'd rather

have the sinner at all times than the man who mocks at his infirmity.' And surely he did show, in telling fashion, the ghastliness of lives without saving charity. The book hurts but is alive—vibrant, gruesome, cruel—but clever, the characters written from inside; therefore it is more than mere talent."

At first the book took the market slowly, and we were content that it should achieve at least a *succès d'estime*. Even the Southron reviewers, to whom the Doric Scots was an almost impassable barrier, were not content to class it as one more Kailyard book and throw it aside; but *The Glasgow Herald* was the first to detect the true keynote, and appraised the book at something like its value. The people most qualified to judge of the worth of an artistic bit of work are not numerous items in the

crowd who anxiously await the newest novel; but by-and-by an appreciative review by Mr. Andrew Lang brought this book within the purview of the inner circle, and then it began to go off more briskly. Not to make too long a story of that which is within the knowledge of everybody, "The House with the Green Shutters" became the most talked of book in literary circles, both in this country and in America; later, the provincial papers heard of it, and many who had ignored their first review copies had to write ignominiously for second copies to enable them to swell the chorus of praise. Last of all, the great public that waits for the newest and the most sensational matter of interest got wind of the book, and began to demand it at the libraries. The total result was that, of the combined British and American editions, some twenty thousand

copies were sold within the year—a good record for a first book.

Brown watched all these developments with anxious interest, and reported progress to his friends almost daily at first, while they carefully preserved reviews and newspaper paragraphs that might serve to indicate to him that the book would go.

After a time, fame came knocking at Brown's door. He suffered for a while from the attentions of society lion-hunters; and he rather seemed to enjoy the novelty, although he smiled at it. A leading authors' agent, who gives out that he never takes up any author until he has secured a success, made two or three applications for Brown's patronage, and is said to have actually hawked his next MS. as a speculation. Several of the leading publishers also intimated to him that they would be only too pleased

to entertain proposals for the publication of his next novel. But the chief pleasure that Brown's success brought to him was derived from the skilled appreciation of the merit of his work, vouchsafed by more than one distinguished man of letters to whom previously he had been an utter stranger.

George Douglas, Novelist

CHAPTER VII

GEORGE DOUGLAS, NOVELIST

THE success of his novel justified Brown in his having devoted to the drudgery of literature, on the humbler side of journalism, the six years that had elapsed since he had left college, and rehabilitated him in the respect and consideration of his friends in Ayrshire. These hastened to offer him their congratulations, and asked him to accept the office of chairman at the annual reunion of "Ochiltronians" on Hogmanay night—New Year's Eve. He accepted the honour, and made opportunity of his visit to Scotland for the occasion

to put himself in touch with a number of his former friends, and to make the acquaintance of a number of Scottish journalists and men of letters to whom his book had revealed him.

Mr. Neil Munro has given the public the benefit of his impressions of Brown as he saw him at this time :—

"He was, to all appearances, strong, athletic even—buoyant, active, in love with life and his work, although he took his pleasures and his labours alike temperately. I had expected something of the swell with the 'Oxford manner' (which the peasant catches by Isis as readily as does the peer's son), and found instead a typical Ayrshire man who might, but for his spectacles and an occasional flight of fancy or scholarship in his speech, have been a young farmer. I had looked for a man

somewhat bitter, too, a cynic, a pessimist, somewhat contemptuous of the country he came from, as one might well be who wrote 'The House with the Green Shutters'; and ten minutes' conversation revealed him for a boyish, cheerful, laughing, whimsical person, well enough pleased with the world as he found it, tolerant to a fault, and as Scots in sympathies and spirit, as well as in speech (when he let himself go), as if he had never left Ochiltree."

The people of Ochiltree, among whom he had been brought up, were proud of "Geordie Broon," for he reflected glory upon the little community and the district of Kyle; and yet they were "just a trifle afraid of him, as one who might conceivably enshrine them in one of these shady pictures of Scottish life that they fully expected him to portray in the days that were to come."

The Ochiltree reunion is a somewhat unique annual gathering of those who have, at one time or another, been schoolfellows in the village school, and, on the occasion upon which Brown presided, this function was celebrating its fortieth anniversary. From a contemporary account we get some idea of the event of the evening—the chairman's address: "As he addressed them, he certainly gave the audience pause. He did not draw forth the customary roll of MS. and read therefrom; but, like Professor Blackie, he stood up, stuck his hands deep into his pockets, and launched forth into the broadest of Lowland Doric—Doric was the term he himself used—'Steek the door, I canna talk wi' an open door.' Soon he dropped into verse celebrating the parish and the occasion, then he followed up with an imaginary 'crack' with the

Burnock Water. It was not a laboured or sustained speech, but its homeliness was studded with unexpected gems that blazed through it like lightning athwart a wintry sky. Occasionally he would turn round to his right-hand supporter—a sheep farmer, great in repartee—and say, 'Will I stop, 'Cloigh?' But, with all his raciness of the soil on which he stood, he bore the marks of the distinction which as a young man of thirty-two he has already attained in scholarship and authorship."

In a rhymed effusion prepared for the occasion, and recited as part of his speech Brown sang the praise of "Auld Ochiltree," her two rivers, and her men. Several of his local friends and acquaintances—"'Cloigh," "The Reidston Lindsays," "Wullie Wylie," "Geordie Miller," and "Whustlin' Davie"—were touched off with humour and

kindliness; and, altogether, the latest "Ochiltronian" to "arrive" showed no disposition to forget the companions and friends of his boyhood's days, but seemed anxious rather to share his glory with his birthplace and the inhabitants thereof.

To-day, the passage in Brown's speech that appears to have remained most vividly in the memories of those who were present is that in which be held converse with the stream that flows through the lower part of the village. The dialogue was mainly concerned with the personalities of people who had at one time or other been resident in the village; and it was brought to a close by an imaginary remark on the part of the stream, to the effect that it must hurry on to join the River Lugar, and would give it "a devil of a dunt" when it reached it.

While at Ochiltree, Brown was the guest of Mr. David Wilson, tenant in Auchencloigh, who, like his neighbours, was better known by the name of his farm, "'Cloigh."

In the course of a humorous epistle, addressed to Mr. Wilson some time after he had returned to England, Brown told of the well-being of "the other 'Cloigh," a collie dog which he had received as a present. "He is very browdened on his new maister," he wrote. "He comes scartin' at my door every morning before I'm up, and bowghs, 'Hey, are ye waukin', Geordie?' My old housekeeper says: 'W'y, sir, 'e be wise enough to be a Christian.'" Thus, in genial and unspoiled fashion, Brown easily resumed his intercourse with the friends of his boyhood, and, as easily, the rich Doric which they best understood as the medium of familiar talk. Glasgow, and Oxford, and

"The House with the Green Shutters" notwithstanding, he was still "Geordie Broon" to the humblest of his early friends and associates.

The young novelist returned to his work after this triumphal tour, settling down in a furnished cottage at Haslemere in Surrey, the well-known country resort of London men of letters. He occupied the "hut" alone, but his landlady came in daily at appointed hours, for the purpose of cooking and serving his food, and of supplying other domestic requirements. He rather relished the seclusion which the style of life afforded him.

Subscribing himself "The Eremite," he wrote one letter to his friend Mr. Melrose, in the course of which he said: "—— and —— came down to see me on Sunday, and though I like them well, it took me a day to get

back to my solitary rut again. The recluse doesn't like his seclusion broken in on, unless it be by Melrose, or somebody of the sort—and then, you see, Melrose won't come to see him."

Country scenery and country life Brown absolutely loved. For one thing, they supplied him with a homelike environment. "He loved to talk to the old gaffers, as if he were one of them; telling them how he had worked on a farm, and knew the routine of their daily toil, and how he loved the clean brown earth, and, *sans* shoes, *sans* hat, had wooed it in an old shirt and a pair of trousers!"

Natural scenery, too, supplied him with inspiration. One of his friends retains a vivid recollection of the description which he gave of a moonlit night that had followed upon a wild, stormy day at Haslemere:

"After being confined to the house all day he had gone out at eleven o'clock at night. 'A great suave, soft-blowing wind was shepherding vast flocks of white clouds' across the sky. The wind was fierce in its vehemence, but 'soft as a baby's cheek' to the touch. The scudding clouds were unusually noticeable. At one moment they 'swept forward in great battalions, heaped and piled and yet hurrying'; a moment later they 'streamed across the heavens like a scattered army.' As they crossed the broad moon, great black shadows scurried along the white roads, reminding the gazer of the fleeting shadows of an April day. The glory of the night was intensified by the sense of absolute loneliness; all the rest of the world was abed, the wide moor was his in sole possession. The experience filled Brown's heart with satisfaction, not, he

said, a 'shouting happiness,' but a 'riotous gladness.' He felt 'half drunk with the mere delight of living.' At midnight he moved homewards, and yet was slow to go indoors. The wind still behaved like a 'jovial ruffian,' still retained its velvet quality. But by that time the big white moon had reached the zenith, and had the sky to herself. 'The white battalions of heaven had swept on,' the vast dome seemed pure with a clean-washed purity."

Brown surely possessed what Walter Bagehot defines as one of the essentials of genius, "an experiencing nature." The facts of nature, the drama of human life interested him; he was sensible of their charms; what other men saw but to forget, he appropriated for himself. He met Bagehot's condition, "The materials for the creative faculty must be provided by

the receptive faculty. Before a man can imagine what will seem to be realities, he must be familiar with what are realities."

The invention of his second novel was now Brown's chief task. This was to be a love story, a romance of the days of Cromwell, and into it he was resolved to put the tender side of his nature. He had also conceived the idea of a plot for a third novel. This was to be called "The Incompatibles," and there is suggestion in the mere title that he contemplated a further study of naked truth, from the artistic point of view, somewhat on the lines of "The House with the Green Shutters."

By fits and starts, too, Brown was pulling into final shape a study of "Hamlet" upon which he had worked with loving care for a number of years. Drama in general had

a great attraction for him, and he had a definite intention to try his hand at playwriting. He studied plays by various playwrights very carefully. He side-marked and annotated copies in his hand, and even made alterations on them, with a view to improvement of plot or handling.

Brown had little patience in witnessing the performance of plays. The artifice of the stage was too transparent for him. But the works of dramatists and poets were among his staple literature. Shakespeare's words he made his own. Stephen Phillips he hailed as a true and strong poet. He was especially enthusiastic over "Paolo and Francesca," frequently quoting such lines as—

> She sits alone among great roses.

He thought that lines like this were

worthy of Milton, and of Milton he was a great lover. "Lycidas" he never tired of repeating, when his friends would listen; and in his talk he revealed an intimacy with all Milton's minor poems. Browning, too, was among his favourites. Familiar with his finest poems, Brown quoted from them largely in the course of ordinary conversation. A paper upon the inner meaning of Browning's poetry was one of the most distinctive of his contributions to the symposiums of the Arnold.

Amid his other studies and pursuits Brown did not miss modern books on topics that interested him. It is perhaps worth mentioning that he read Mr. T. W. H. Crosland's "Unspeakable Scot," in which a chapter is devoted to "Barbie." He thought that the savagery of this book was partly assumed for purposes of humour, but

that there was "a great deal of bitter truth in it, bitterly expressed." While he confessed that he enjoyed it, he expressed the belief that it would not sell. "I devoutly hope," he said, "that no Scottish fool will write to the papers protesting against it, for that is the very thing that Crosland wants."

From the immediately preceding pages, it will be observed that life at Haslemere was far from monotonous. There was a considerable and varied programme of work to be overtaken; and there was variety of profitable recreation besides. Brown's visits to town were infrequent, and most irregular in their occurrence, and he always seemed to be glad to return to his "hut," and to solitude.

Dead ere his Prime

CHAPTER VIII

DEAD ERE HIS PRIME

IN the course of the previous pages of the present sketch, we have more than once referred to Brown's splendid physique. Sprung from an ancestry closely associated with the hardy but healthy labour of those who till the soil, he possessed a well-knit frame; and this had been developed during his boyhood, in circumstances which gave him sufficient scope for healthy exercise, without recourse to the artificial aid of athletics. "If ever a man was built for a long life, it was Brown," Mr. Robert Barr has said.

There was one weak spot in Brown's constitution, and that, as with Carlyle, was his liver. Throughout his University career, and especially in the unsuitable climate of Oxford, he had much ado to stimulate his jecoric functions, and in London and at Haslemere he did not entirely escape. For many of us it requires no stretch of imagination to picture the limitations from which his work must have suffered in consequence. His letters supply ample confirmation. For example, in November, 1901, he told of "liver and stomach bothers," of which he had only got rid by walking and diet.

Some months later, he wrote again that he was suffering from appalling lethargy of mind and body, "liver, not laziness." He could idle away existence in a gross and heavy dream, and had to pinch himself

angrily, in order to keep his mind fixed on his work.

Even his morbid physical sensations were of interest to the young novelist. He talked of making a study of the lethargic character ; an incidental sketch, rather. He thought that there was a distinct place for incidental psychological sketches in a novel. The novelist was sometimes very familiar with significant traits which, nevertheless, were hardly big enough to make the framework of a whole novel ; but if he would work them in as features of his minor characters, these would impress by their truth and (if well handled) add to a full conviction of the whole. Balzac, Brown noted, had done this with the character of La Fosseuse in " The Country Doctor."

Brown made one or two excursions to Scotland after his triumphal visit, but his

appearances in London were infrequent and brief. His habits being those of a solitary man, no concern was felt by his friends when weeks and even months passed without any letter from him. Certainly the idea of illness was the last thing that would have occurred to any of them, although Brown had had one or two illnesses which had necessitated his lying in bed for a few days.

On Monday, August 25th, Brown came to London, not this time with eager confidence and anticipation of enjoying himself with his friends, but as a sick man. A few days before, one of his hepatic attacks had driven him to athletic exercises of a violent kind. There was consciousness of a lesion as a result of his violence. A slight spitting of blood and an irritating cough ensued ; but, true to his method, he resolved to fight it down, and walked, smoked, and

worked as usual. The symptoms, instead of lessening, grew worse. On the Sunday night he had no sleep, and on the Monday, by the advice of a neighbour, he made the visit to town to consult a medical man.

When he came to the house of his friend, Mr. Melrose, at Highgate, Brown tried to comport himself bravely. With the greatest difficulty able to speak, his first words on entering the house were: "Don't be alarmed; I look bad, but there is nothing seriously wrong with me." Alarming as his appearance was, his friends were only too glad to believe his reassuring protest. Two hours before, he had been examined by a West End physician, who had prescribed simple remedies, and declared that his patient would be all right in a day or two.

That night a little relief was obtained, and Brown sat talking of books and literary

topics until one o'clock in the morning. On the Tuesday morning, his friend, going cheerfully into his room, was distressed to find that he had never been in bed. The relief of the previous night had been but temporary, and his symptoms were as bad as ever. A medical man who visited him the same day declared him to be suffering from severe congestion of the throat, but not dangerously ill.

That night was spent as the preceding night had been; and, while his words were brave, there was manifested a growing uneasiness on Brown's part. Usually a very self-reliant man, he now showed a disinclination to be left alone, and seemed grateful for the constant attention of his friends. Yet he steadily refused to allow other friends to be summoned, his excuse being: "I'm not seriously ill, you know; painful.

but not dangerous." By this time, however, Mr. Melrose was thoroughly alarmed, and another physician was called—one who had attended Brown in the same household a year before, and to whom he was warmly attached. The medical diagnosis was rendered extremely difficult by Brown's distress, and the physician confessed himself puzzled. He, in common with his confrères, however, declared that there was no immediate danger ; and so Brown's friends took heart again, and hoped for the best.

All this time Brown had been sitting up. He found himself easier so, and disliked the idea of going to bed ; but a nurse had been summoned that night, and she insisted, as a preliminary of her ministrations, that he should take the position of a patient ; in short, that he should be in bed. Some premonition that he would never rise from

the couch may have been upon him, for he strenuously opposed the idea, and only the united persuasion of his friends made him yield. From this time he grew worse.

In the middle of the night, Brown's friends, Mr. Melrose and Mr. Howard Spicer, who had gone to snatch a brief sleep, were awakened hastily to receive the gravest of news. The sick man's condition was changing; and, for the first time, the fear that he was dying flashed over the minds of the watchers. Medical assistance was at once procured; but, beyond the administering of oxygen to relieve the breathing, and hypodermic injections to stimulate the heart, nothing could be done. Gradually Brown grew weaker, although he retained consciousness. About nine in the morning he said: "I ken you fine," in reply to a question, and these were his last words.

Shortly afterwards he sank into a comatose state, only broken by spasms. This condition continued for about an hour; then, at ten o'clock on the morning of Thursday, August 28th, the last struggle came, and George Douglas Brown was no more.

The obscurity of the disease that had carried Brown off suggested the desirability of a postmortem examination; but, in deference to the feelings of his fiancée, the idea was abandoned. The medical theory is, however, that, although there was bad congestion of the throat, and might have been rupture of the trachea, a clot of blood had travelled towards the heart and been the actual cause of death.

The mortal remains of George Douglas Brown were removed to Scotland, and on Monday, September 1st, they were laid to

rest in the cemetery at Ayr, beside those of his beloved mother.

At a time of sickness, or in a moment of *weldtschmertz*, Brown wrote a poem, of which the following two verses may fitly close the story of his short and strenuous life :—

Bury me deep on the Bennan Hill,
Where I may face the sea,
And sleep a lang and blessed sleep
Till Christ shall waken me.

. . . . . .

Hid, the whaup may skirl in the lanely sky,
And the sun shine miles aroon,
And quately the stately ships gae by,
But I'll be sleeping soun.

The news of Brown's death came upon his many friends and on the public with inevitable suddenness, and the shock was one of pained surprise. It was difficult to believe that the strong and healthy and joyous man, who had been moving about

among his fellows until ten days before, was dead. It was difficult to realise that speculations as to the possible development of the undoubted genius of George Douglas Brown had been put beyond the reach of probation. It was difficult to accept with resignation the removal of a young writer who had given distinct promise of acquiring fresh laurels for his Almæ Maters, for Scotland, and for English literature.

The chorus of regretful appreciation was loud and sustained. Throughout the domains of respectable journalism, critics and friends hastened to lay their wreaths upon the young Scotsman's tomb, to give voice to their sense of loss, to mark the grave of their buried expectations. By way of illustration, two representative quotations may suffice.

Mr. Charles Whibley has recorded the

opinion that the two qualities of freshness and maturity are peculiarly characteristic of "George Douglas," "who was at once a sound scholar and an uncompromising realist." "In the first place," continues Mr. Whibley, "none but a scholar could have written George Douglas's masterpiece, which is composed severely upon the lines of a Sophoclean tragedy. There is a real Nemesis in the grandeur of the house; there is a true irony in the poker just the same size as the rim of the fender, which is at once Gourlay's pride and death. And the critics who compared George Douglas to Balzac would have been wiser had they remembered the Greeks. The 'bodies,' too, who comment upon the action of the drama, and constantly feed the fire of Gourlay's irritation, are nothing more nor less than a Greek chorus, and though the book is far more

complex in construction than the simple model upon which it is built, its origin is clearly demonstrated. In the second place, the book is, like its author, perfectly sincere. Its very savagery is imposed by a transparently honest purpose. It is quite possible that had not the school of the Kailyard flourished, 'The House with the Green Shutters,' would have taken on a different shape. But once George Douglas was resolved to tell the truth of his native Scotland, he spared none of the facts. It is true that there is a certain griminess in the book, but it is not griminess for its own sake. Mr. Douglas did not heap up statistics, as M. Zola is wont to heap them up, merely to astonish the Philistines. He drew what he believed to be an accurate picture, and he added no details which did not illustrate the whole, or enhance the effect.

Above all, he was an accomplished writer, whose style was always sound and always appropriate."

Of George Douglas Brown the man, one who knew him with some degree of intimacy has contributed the following appreciation to the columns of the *Ayr Advertiser*:—

"He had a sane view of life. In spite of many trials, he ever went on with a compelling determination to grow in character—and 'arrive.' He was modest, listened to the opinions of others, had a winning way of making commonplace things alive and interesting, and held that in all men was the Divine spark, however flickering and obscure. He loved colour, space, flowers—all nature. To George Douglas, child life was sacred, and death but the gateway to full life. He never failed a friend or harmed an enemy. Fair, sane perception of humanity's ultimate

happy perfection, contagious mirth, a passionate enthusiasm for the true in everything, and boundless charity, allied to brilliant brain power, made him a fascinating personality. To those who really knew him, he will never be dead. His friends, who have lost the stimulus (except in memory) of a bracing comradeship, sometimes wish he had never written a book, that was held so mistakenly to mirror the man, and was only a forerunner of greater things that would have proved his genius—in vastly different fashion—had he lived. Intellect big, character bigger, George Douglas Brown died as he lived, a fighter plucky to the end."

In ordinary circumstances, it would have fallen to the present writer to complete this chapter with a summing up in appreciation

of the qualities and attributes of George Douglas Brown's character and personality and an estimate of the ultimate value and place of his short life-work. But the compilers of this volume have had the good fortune to secure permission to reprint the most intimate appreciation of George Douglas Brown that has been given to the public—that contributed by his friend, Mr. Andrew Melrose, to the columns of *The Bookman*—and the writer's task is completed when he refers the reader to this reminiscent sketch of a friendship and a notable novel.

Reminiscences of a Friendship and a Notable Novel

By Andrew Melrose

GEORGE DOUGLAS BROWN

REMINISCENCES OF A FRIENDSHIP AND A NOTABLE NOVEL

By Andrew Melrose

I

I HAVE no means of fixing definitely the date of my first meeting with George Douglas Brown. Probably it was in the late summer of 1898. Although I do not remember the date of our first meeting, I have a very vivid recollection of the meeting itself, brought about by my friend Howard Spicer. Mr. Spicer, who was at the time editing *Sandow's Magazine*, said that he

wanted me to meet a new man he had got hold of, who was, he thought, worth knowing. And it was at the office of *Sandow's Magazine*, in Arundel Street, that I first met Brown. What impressed me most about him was his intense seriousness, and a certain deprecatory manner in giving his opinions on literary matters. I never knew Brown as anything else but a serious man, although we had many happy days and royal nights together ; but I speedily got to know that he did not hold his opinions in a deprecatory fashion. The manner I have indicated sprang from a kind of shyness, a reluctance to make himself fully known until he was sure of perfect sympathy. Once assured of this, no man could lay down the law with more royal arrogance. It was one of the delights of our subsequent relations that we both exercised the right of stating our opinions

as if they were ultimate; and it was all the better fun when it happened, as it often did, that we took, or pretended to take, diametrically opposite views.

I had a feeling in those days that Brown was a lonely man. In the course of conversation the names of various men, journalists and others, cropped up, as indicating that he had a fair number of friends. Of only one man, however, did he speak with the kind of familiarity which indicates intimacy. With Mr. Montagu Emanuel, an old Balliol friend, he had constant and close relations, and at his home he was on a footing of familiar friendship. I always thought of Brown as a man who had many friends, but no real intimates; and he was the kind of man for whose true development an intimate was essential. This impression was confirmed by his

remarking, not once, but many times in the course of our friendship, that he had revealed himself to me more than to any other man he had ever known.

II

It was not his modesty, however, although that was delightful, nor his seriousness, which was unusual, that drew me to him. It was his intense interest in literature. One meets with many men engaged in journalism, and respectable enough as authors, who are conventionally interested in literature as "shop"; but, so far as my own experience goes, it is a rare thing to meet a man who translates all life into literature, and who can therefore talk of the subject at all times with freshness and without repeating himself, and with the enthusiasm which

indicates a man possessed by his subject. Such a man was G. D. Brown, and therefore the days and nights which we spent together are among the most vivid of my recollections as they were among the most enjoyable experiences of my life. The biggest bout of talking we ever had was three years ago, when we spent a fortnight's holiday together, and talked literature practically all the time, every day, and half of every night. I hardly need to explain that our conversation was not mainly, nor in any great part, of published books, new or old, but was chiefly concerned with potential literature, the kind of books that should be written, the fundamental principles which must underlie all worthy books, the pure aim and unworldly purpose which should inform them.

As a matter of fact, although Brown, as a reviewer of books and a publisher's reader,

read as much, and probably more, modern literature than I, he had very little to say at any time about new writers; and his reading of the older authors had by no means been extensive. It was amazing, for instance, to find that Carlyle was practically unknown to him. Emerson he had never read, until we read a volume of the essays together on a holiday; he declared that he had never realised the beauty of Tennyson until I read "Maud" to him; and only the day before he died he was looking for the first time at "Mosses from an Old Manse," and saying he must read Hawthorne. He said, and I have no doubt it was true, that the majority of books had so little to give him that he did not find it worth his while to read them. If a man can write essential stuff himself, why should he put off his time reading the platitudes of the average

book? was a favourite question with him. And no man ever felt surer that he had something essential to say in books than George Douglas Brown.

"The damning fault in most of the books I read," he once wrote to me, "is that nothing in them seems to leap at you from out the pages. They are talky-talky, vapid. There is an article in —— in which a man has talked round about his subject for nine aimless pages. Now, easy and sleepy writing may have a charm in a very few places; but most books, and certainly all books of the kind we want, should be pregnant and packed." This gives the key to his own position as a novelist. He was a realist, not because he loved sordid details and the limning of ugly subjects, but because he would have his characters so true to life that they would "leap at you from out the

page." And he sacrificed the pleasure of indulging in descriptive writing, for which he had unusual qualification, because he wanted to have every phrase essential to the story, to make every word bite in its meaning. Although he did not seek for the significant among modern books, he was greatly pleased when he came across them ; and occasionally when he came to my home he made discoveries which rejoiced him. Of many books to which I directed his attention, two especially he thought uncommonly good—Miss Guiney's "Patrins," and Professor Raleigh's "Style." He made the acquaintance of these books on two separate occasions. On each occasion he took a volume to read after we had parted in the small hours of the morning, and when we met at breakfast he was full of the subject. When he left my home he

carried off the books, and absolutely refused to give them back!

III

How well Brown lived up to his ideals, and with what tremendous force he could actualise them, I realised for the first time when I heard him read the original MS. of the first and last novel associated with his name. "The House with the Green Shutters" was at that time a finished story of twenty thousand words, so packed that it gave the feeling of excessive strain. The memory of that reading comes vividly back to my mind. In a half-furnished cottage down in Surrey, belonging to Howard Spicer, three of us were squatting on the floor on rugs, for lack of chairs. For a whole afternoon two of us smoked

in silence while Brown read his famous story. He knew us fairly well by this time, but not familiarly enough to enable him to read his own work without diffidence; and I remember what a great nervous strain it was upon him. The interest of the story was so painfully absorbing that, even in the intervals when the reader paused to rest, we had no mind to criticise, but in the grip of its impending tragedy smoked vigorously in silence. When it was finished, the cumulative effect was tremendous. The story had many and obvious defects, and these were noted by us with frank criticism; but from that time I never doubted that, if Brown got his chance, he would make a distinctive place for himself in literature.

As a result of our criticism, Brown agreed not to place his MS. as a short story, but to extend it to a full-length novel. He was

pleased by our appreciation, which was, he said, the first he had received; and he made me promise to read it when extended, and to make suggestions. Later on, he was not so humble about his book; and a year after, as it approached completion, when I made some criticism upon it, I saw that he had got the bit between his teeth, as it were, and was not disposed to take criticism readily. He professed to see its faults; he admitted that it went in some particulars right in the face of artistic principles which he was constantly laying down. "I believe you are right, ——; but I have a feeling now that this book has got to go *as it is*." Humorously threatening to have my revenge in a review, I accepted his mood, and at subsequent readings rarely offered any comment, saving this: "If the book goes—and it cannot quite fail—it will be in

spite of its defects." That it would have a literary success we never for a moment doubted, but I must frankly own that we were not prepared for the popular success which it achieved here and in America.

IV

Brown's position for a while gave me much anxious thought. All the men of his acquaintance, myself included, were in more or less settled positions; they had found work and settled down to it seriously. For them each day brought duties, each week or month brought the pecuniary reward of work. Brown alone had no regular employment; he acknowledged no duties, and in fact shunned anything like an attempt to get him into settled work. On one occasion two of his friends talked the matter over, and

decided that they would try to get him fixed. Within a few weeks a position of a literary kind, carrying £600 a year as salary, was bespoken for him. He had all the qualifications desiderated—University degree, literary ability, and the like—and his nomination was favourably entertained. We made haste to tell him the good news, but he took it with a marked lack of enthusiasm. I remember the quizzically amused look on his face when we told him that an appointment had been made for him to meet one of the principals concerned next day; and I had an idea that he had no intention of putting in an appearance. I was not deceived. Brown did not turn up; the post was given to another man, and we made no second attempt to put our friend in harness. It must not be supposed, however, that he was averse to work. When he had a fit of

industry on, nothing would induce him to interrupt it; and when his exchequer ran low, he would "swot" for days, as hard as any journalist, reviewing, writing sketches, articles, and odd paragraphs. But he valued his freedom so much that he would not take up any work which demanded regularity of hours and some method.

V

Brown was a great stroller in London parks—not at fashionable hours, however, but in the early hours of the forenoon, when, except for children playing, and guardian nursemaids, they are practically deserted. I have wandered with him in these early hours, and he has shown to me his favourite retreats. In the glades of Kensington Gardens he found quiet spots, in which, but for the

dull roar of the traffic that surges round, one might imagine oneself in the heart of a deep wood. Here he spent many a summer morning, lying on his back in the fresh grass, looking up into the trees that threw over him their welcome shelter. To a casual observer he was simply loafing, as any man might loaf who found himself in a London park on a bright summer morning, with no definite duties to perform. Brown was, indeed, loafing physically on these occasions, but he was by no means loafing mentally. This was a marked characteristic of the man—that while he shunned *settled* work, he probably wasted less time in mooning than any man of his acquaintance. He could not always write, but he could always think; and he was practically innocent of the intellectual laziness which spells ruin for so many fine minds.

Some of us carry notebooks and never use them. Brown always carried a notebook, and that notebook was a necessity of his intellectual habits. He designedly sought for ideas; when they came, he knew them for his own, and, with the careful providence of a man determinedly preparing for a career, he noted them down. He had a great admiration for style too; and while his utterance was free, spontaneous, and instinctively selective, in writing he deliberately restrained himself and struggled for the most fitting and expressive word. "What do you think of this definition of style?" he asked one night. "I wrote the other day a definition that rather pleased me: 'Style is supernal thought supernally expressed.'" Whatever may be thought of the definition, Brown certainly believed that the best style was only got by "working

at," and he declared many a time to me that his chief hindrance in working, was, not the lack of ideas, but the difficulty of getting the right word. It was therefore only consistent, that he should note down fresh words and phrases that occurred to him when thinking on any subject. In this connection I remember vividly a Saturday-afternoon conversation in which I could not get a cut in, because of the eager interest with which he compared notes as to the birth of ideas and the clothing of them in fitting words with—a professor of theology!—Dr. D. W. Simon, of Bradford United College. The two men, so widely different in every other respect, found on the purely intellectual side that they had much in common. A whole pile of notebooks filled with ideas and phrases were Brown's stock-in-trade. They were all his own; he

was almost foolishly jealous of the influence of other minds on his own, and he did not believe in using quotations.

VI

I never troubled about Brown's position after a certain Saturday afternoon nearly two and a half years ago. We had lunched together, and then the whim took us to go to Carlyle's house. The day was one of sweltering heat, and I remember the pleasant relief it was to get into that "house of proud Silences," which is still instinct with a human interest not surpassed by any other literary shrine. Brown was no Carlylean student, but he knew sufficient of his life and work to understand Carlyle's essential worth; and I, who had visited the house before, was not *blasé*. Somehow or other,

after looking at several of the relics and talking of the irascible old man of the "Reminiscences," something tickled our sense of humour, and our gurgling laughter was taken as indicating a lack of proper reverence, I fear, by a party of keen-looking Americans who were solemnly examining everything. We did not complete the inspection of the house, but came out, and then on a 'bus homewards we talked of many things with gathering seriousness and intimacy. Finally, I spoke of my feeling about him, a man of thirty, who had not "done" anything, nor begun to make a place for himself in the world. I asked him what his definite aim was, and the answer came unhesitatingly, "To be a novelist." My second question was, "Do you feel certain that the 'Green Shutters' will make you arrive?" And the reply was swift and

confident : " Absolutely certain, ——." From another man, this would have meant nothing save the confidence that is not generally lacking in young writers. Coming from G. D. Brown, somehow it carried a kind of conviction, and I promised that I would never again trouble myself about his future, and I never did.

On this occasion I remember he told me he was quite conscious that his position was misunderstood by many men of his acquaintance. " I never speak about my novel," he said, " except to you and —— and ——. The men I knew at Oxford think I am not going to come off. But it does not matter. —— is always anxious that I should justify myself to the Oxford men, and I think I'll do it, but there's no hurry "

VII

It has been stated in a Scottish weekly by a journalist and novelist, who met Brown once, that he did not greatly value his book, and was a little surprised at its success. I have shown that the former statement is very far wide of the facts—that he valued it so highly that he would practically admit no criticism of it. A still more striking proof of his opinion of his work was his remark, "I know it sounds arrogant, but I have a feeling that it does not greatly matter who publishes my book; it is bound to go."

When "The House with the Green Shutters" was accepted by an American house on the recommendation of the well-known critic, Mr. Charles Whibley, he was,

however, frankly pleased; and there was a sly dig at me in the letter which announced the news—"M'Clure told me Whibley's report was commendatory throughout"; but he adds naïvely, "I tell you this, because you will be even more pleased than I am." On its publication, he sent me a copy with this message: "Herewith a copy of the immortal Work. Disembowel it, or laud it to the skies, as seemeth good to thy soul. . . ."

As to its success, Brown's expectations were large. He believed it might run to twenty thousand copies, and before he died there was a feeling with him that, given certain conditions, it ought to have done so. Surprised at the success which it had he certainly was not. It is a fact, though, that he spoke gratefully of the kind reception it got from the Press. There were exceptions, however

"Rather idiotic review in *The Scotsman*, but they put it first in their list of fiction, and vote it disagreeably powerful. Goodish review in *Glasgow Herald*: 'True to the verge of being merciless . . . If we smile, it is at the cruel point of some stinging jest. . . . Shows with a vengeance, too, the reverse of the Drumtochty shield. . . . Overdrawn, but grimly true, and full of promise.'" These and other excerpts from reviews which he sent me from time to time showed how keenly he followed the progress of his book. "So far," he writes again, "nobody but *The Glasgow Herald* man has seen that I'm showing up the Scot malignant—which you and I thought, in a way, the *raison d'être* of the book. *Scotsman* fellow says 'it's brutally coarse.' Coarse!"

During the first few weeks after the publication of his book, Brown was indeed very

anxious about its fate. Various circumstances had conspired to delay its appearance in England; and the fact that for a while it excited no particular attention made him fear it was going to be swamped in the flood of Christmas publications. During these weeks there were few days in which Brown did not come to see us. We knew what he came for, and gave him every comfort in the way of "signs" of success which we could gather. But we began to fear that we were going to be disappointed in our hopes. Several extended and good notices had appeared in England—notably one, I think, in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, which greatly pleased Brown; but it was not until it was noticed by Mr. Andrew Lang in *Longman's Magazine* that the tide began to flow unmistakably in its favour Equally favourable notices in *The Times*,

in *The Morning Post*, and in *The Monthly Review*—one of them at least, perhaps all, from the same hand—set the fashion; after this, reviews were numerous, and each more favourable than the other. In a few weeks, "The House with the Green Shutters" was in everybody's mouth, and its author was the most-talked-of man in literary circles in London.

Of the book itself it is not necessary for me to speak critically. I had my chance of a review, and I did not "disembowel it"; for it was in the early days, when its fate seemed uncertain, and this was not the function of a friend. I did not ignore its defects, but found it on a final reading—as I had found it at the beginning—the most significant and powerful novel I had read for a decade at least.

VIII

Brown was keenly conscious that his book was apt to give the impression of a savage, cynical nature, and he shrank from being so misunderstood. It was probably this consciousness that influenced him in the choice of a subject for his next work. He chose a love story, a romance of Cromwell's time, in which he was resolved to express the tender side of his nature. The romance is unfinished, and probably will never appear, even as a fragment; and so those who took their impression of the author's nature from the types of characters that he drew with such merciless fidelity in his one book, must be content to readjust their opinion of him from the picture of the man as he appeared to his intimate friends. Whether Brown

would have been as successful with the story which he had projected, as he was in "The House with the Green Shutters" remains an interesting speculation. Probably he would have been more at home with a third novel which he had planned—"The Incompatibles"; and my instinctive feeling is that in a subject like this he would more readily and fully have exercised his extraordinary powers. This also is a mere conjecture, however. Certainly he got his fame not so much by his performance as by what that performance promised. The possibilities were great, but they have been swept into the eternities to ripen; and the question as to whether he might have become a master of English literature, or whether he was, as some thought, a man of one book, can never be answered. He lived his short life simply and seriously; the work that he

felt impelled to do he did with sincerity and fine conscientiousness. In a few brief months he had leapt from obscurity into amazing literary fame, and he died planning his life-work.

All is over and done;
Render thanks to the Giver, England, for thy son.

IX

I have thought it necessary to say so much about the origin and progress of Brown's book because of the place which the novel has achieved in contemporary literature. But during the early years of our acquaintance I had no thought of his becoming a famous author; and our friendship was that of two men who had a great deal in common, whose intimate friendships were few, and whose view of life was

practically identical. Circumstances ripened our intimacy quickly; and a closer friendship, on certain sides, than ours became is to me inconceivable.

As an outcome of many conversations upon the essential in literature, there was formed a partnership of three for literary purposes, the third partner being Howard Spicer. The literary purpose took shape in a kind of authors' advisory agency, for encouraging the writers of what we termed "essential stuff." There was, of course, a room in Fleet Street, where all three met after six o'clock at night for conversation and the airing of projects. It was a small room on the roof, furnished modestly, but sufficient for comfort; and it had a glorious view across to the Surrey Hills. Brown, as being the only one of us whose time was his own, was appointed "Manager" and

Correspondent for the "Triumvirate," as we gravely designated the partnership. To me the scheme was more or less a joke—albeit one in which I saw possibilities serious enough for Brown—but we went about it as if we were hoping to make fame and fortune out of it. We had advertisements in literary papers, inviting MSS., which were to be considered and criticised for a ridiculously small fee. For some months, Brown played the rôle of manager and correspondent sedulously enough; but the poor quality of the MSS. which came in was disappointing, and the task of reading and criticising stuff that had no place but the W.P.B. soon irritated him, and as a literary agency the venture was an inglorious failure.

The room was kept on for two years, however, as a meeting-place, and many a good time we had in it. Occasionally, but

not often, we introduced a friend; and on such occasions, I feel confident, the visitor left us utterly mystified as to the purpose of the partnership, and with vague doubts of our sanity. We had an idea of publishing too, and our immortal work was to be "The House with the Green Shutters"—a book which was at once to bring grist to the "Triumvirate," and to be an indication of the kind of stuff that we were prepared to run. When the book was finished Brown would have kept to his bargain, but I persuaded him against it, as I knew that the immediate success of his novel would be hindered by the imprint of a new publishing house.

If the commercial side of the partnership was a joke, the "Triumvirate" as a friendship was not. Brown himself took it as seriously as any of us. We had a little tiff one day

before an outsider, and this drew a letter from me. In the course of a long reply he said, "I agree with all you say about the Triumvirate speaking with one voice and as one man against all outsiders, *even if these outsiders be personal friends* of one or other member of the Triumvirate." This was the basis of our partnership. United in sympathies and in fundamental ideas of literature, we three were to be as one man. The partnership had never a break until death came.

X

Early in our friendship Brown was introduced to my home, and, fortunately for our personal relations, he was liked so well there that it was a red-letter night when he came. He often came; he never announced his coming—he came when the mood struck

him : as he was a Bohemian, he never made any preparations for stopping. Yet he always remained overnight, and sometimes his visit ran into three weeks. He liked being able to visit in this informal fashion, and he was never an unwelcome guest.

On one occasion his unexpected arrival landed Brown in a ludicrous position. My family were from home, and I had not seen Brown for some days. One Saturday night he had taken it into his head to stop with me, and at about ten o'clock at night he turned up at the house, only to find me out. He had put on a frock-coat and top-hat, intending to go to church with me the next day; but this amiable desire to make himself respectable proved his undoing, for the caretaker, who had seen him a week before in a lounge suit and straw hat, did not recognise him in his finery, and refused to

allow him to enter. Expostulation was in vain: the man was firm in refusing an entrance. Finally, he agreed to let him in to wait my home-coming, on condition that he—the man—sat in the same room with him. And in my den Brown remained practically in custody for two hours. He told me afterwards that he was seriously discomposed at the position, for he had come without money, and would have needed to walk back to town if I had not turned up. I need not say that Brown bore no grudge against the man who had done his duty not wisely but too well.

XI

As a talker, Brown was more vital than any other man I have ever met. He had great silences, but during these periods he

remained by himself. He came to us when he wanted to talk, and he found us always ready. His conversation was like his writing—keen, incisive, and significant. I never knew a man talk better, in the sense that his sentences were perfectly formed, although there was not the slightest preparation. Like many another man, his best talk was after twelve o'clock at night. Probably we never went to bed before half-past one, and often it was two and three o'clock when we turned in. When all other subjects had been exhausted, there still remained Shakespeare. And on Shakespeare my friend could talk at all times. He had a magnificent verbal memory, and was never at a loss to illustrate his conversations by long quotations from the author of whom he was speaking. In "talking Shakespeare," this faculty stood him in good stead.

His exposition of "Hamlet," which I hope will be given to the world soon, was in substance recited to me three years ago during a fortnight's holiday which we spent at the seaside together. Yet he had not a sheet of MS. before him. I believe this will be found to be one of the most strikingly original and profound expositions of "Hamlet" that have ever been written. It will make secure the position as a thinker which Brown by his single work might have held precariously. Another proof of how completely Shakespeare swept him away, when he got on the subject, was supplied by the fact that on one occasion, during a three weeks' visit to Howard Spicer's home, the one literary subject talked of all the time was "Hamlet." To Spicer, as to me, he practically recited the whole of what is now the complete exposition. He was a student

of Meredith, and, more critically perhaps, of Balzac. Burns he had—like the Ayrshire man he was—at his finger-tips; and while he would, in the rushes of impetuous talk, suddenly dive into a book-shelf for the purpose of reading from an author a passage to point his meaning, he could repeat by heart all of Burns that he desired to familiarise his hearer with.

Like all men with original and active intellectual power, Brown had a great capacity for being bored; and although he had a robustious side to him which made him appear "a right good chap" to men of a totally different cast, many instances come back to me of his arranging to meet one or other of the "Triumvirate" for the pure purpose of escaping from company in which he found himself but with which he had no real sympathy. On one occasion,

I remember, he was living up the river; and, after being bored to madness for a week, he wired to one of us, begging us to send a telegram saying that urgent business called him to London. On the other hand, he would enter with sympathy and the keenest interest into affairs of simple, unpretentious people; and because of this he was a hero to many a humble old person who never suspected his literary powers.

XII

Because there is a great deal of "damning" in his book, and an abundance of expletive that is not choice, it has been supposed, in many quarters, that Brown was without reverence and without religion. Nothing could be further from the truth. His reverence was instinctive and profound,

and his nature was intensely religious. I had not known Brown long, when he talked religion to me voluntarily: at first, diffidently, then with a surge and without restraint he told me of his experience. I would like to tell it, but some things are too intimate to repeat, even after a man is gone; and my instinct is to let the details of that memorable confidence remain untold. Suffice it to say that Brown had had a marked religious turning-point; a new view of life had made existence a good thing and work a joyful duty, at a juncture when, as he put it, "hell had filled his heart." When I heard this confidence, I knew why Brown struck me at first chiefly by his seriousness. One of the ideas the "Trumvirate" held in common was that religion is at the back of all abiding literature, and that there can be no real literature

that is wholly without essential religion. And he held, if possible more firmly than I, that only those who see the world on a background of eternity can write great literature.

I hope it is not necessary to explain that it is not intended here to claim Brown for an orthodox Christian. *That* he never had been, probably never could have become. Yet there is no saying. With all his royal arrogance of intellect, he had, on the side of the Unseen, a very simple heart, and at no time could he have sat in the seat of the scorner. It is a curious fact that, about a year ago, he volunteered the information that he had begun to read the Bible a great deal; and I know from observation that, for months before he left town for Haslemere, he read a great deal in the New Testament. I do not see why I should not

say here, finishing this part of my paper, that, not once but many times, in the course of our conversation, when certain crudities of evangelical belief came up, he prefaced his criticism by saying, "You're a believer, ——. So am I, as you know; but——" and then would follow his objection to something he had heard or read of a religious but unintelligent kind.

XIII

I have spoken of his humility on the side of the great mysteries, as contrasted with his arrogance on the strictly intellectual side. He was humble on another side—the side of his friendship. Listen to an extract from a letter written three years ago. It is almost too sacred for reprinting, but for various reasons I give it. We had had a misunderstanding, our first and only one: "... But

my dear —— (and this is the point), even if the irritation had been real on your side, even if you had railed at and scolded and hurt me, it would have made no difference to the love and affection I have for you. . . . There can never be any essential difference between you and me. Even if we parted in anger (which God forbid), and never spoke to each other again, our souls would still be friends." Friendship, however, on Brown's side did not blind him to defects, real or imaginary, which he detected in his friends. Still less was he blind to his own generous faults. "I have features in my character," he says further on, "which I know you can't altogether approve of—and yet you love me in spite of them. And so I love you in spite of all your faults, were they a thousand times worse than my too hot temper ever made them out to be."

After this it will not be surprising to hear that his outlook on life was neither savage nor pessimistic. On the contrary, it was kindly and optimistic. No one thought of his fellows with more sympathetic feelings ; no one was more keen to observe the finer graces which occasionally flower in lives that seem wholly materialistic, and his relations with children were of a kind only possible to a sunny nature and a pure heart. He liked children, he had more than a superficial interest in their ways, and as a consequence some of his most devoted friends were among the children of the homes which he visited.

XIV

When his day of fame came, he neither rioted in it nor shunned it. He was not

humble about his book and its success, but he remained practically unaffected by it. The signs of his new place among men were the same to him as they always are to one who has made a literary success. Not a day passed without a reference to him or his book in some newspaper. The people whom he had not courted began to court him, and several eminent publishers wrote hoping that he would submit his next book to them. From authors' agents he had repeated communications, and some people of fashion, who make a practice of bringing literary lions together, opened their doors to welcome him. In those days Brown did not lose his head. His dress was as careless as ever, his habits Bohemian as they had always been, his visits to his friends as unexpected, and his conversation of the same range and quality as during the time of his obscurity.

Whatever Brown thought of his book, it was never a subject of conversation with him after it had attracted notice, and, in all the evenings that we spent together during the last months of his life, "The House with the Green Shutters" was practically never mentioned. Probably, the one thing in his success that gave him unqualified pleasure, was the consciousness that men whose opinion he valued had acknowledged the ability of his book. In this connection the first gratifying proof that he had attracted attention was a letter which Mr. Andrew Lang wrote to him. Newspaper critics had said some kind things about the power of the book, but these reviews had carried no signatures. When frank appreciation, without the slightest hint of patronage, came from one in the front rank of literature—a scholar of his own college, and a total stranger to

him—he tasted, perhaps, the first sweets of success, and his expression of pleasure when he told me the news was ingenuous and delightful.

From the literary men and journalists with whom he had always had more or less association he got appreciation of a different kind, even more marked. He began to be sought out at his lodgings, to be questioned on literary matters, to be asked for advice, and to receive other such indications that he was looked upon as a writer who had "arrived," as the phrase goes. He gave himself no airs, however; he did not take himself with new seriousness, although he was conscious that he might have done so without offence. He noted the new deference that was paid to him by men who had never before considered him, save as one to whom they might do a kindness by giving a job. He

affected to be amused by and superior to this new manifestation, but in reality he succumbed to the flattery of it. It was no wonder. To be one day a hack journalist, living from hand to mouth, kicking his heels in editors' outer offices, waiting for a commission to write half-crown paragraphs, to be their "useful man"; and the next day to find these editors and others taking a railway journey of sixty miles for the pure pleasure of smoking a pipe with him as the most-talked-of author of the day, was something which only a less generous and ingenuous man than Brown could have experienced unmoved.

Besides, although he was one of the most-talked-of men in London, Brown was still one of the poorest. Indeed, until two months before he died, he was still living a precarious existence. To those

who think of a successful novel as an instant source of wealth to its author, this fact will appear amazing and disappointing. But a fact it is; and although he sometimes commented upon his poverty humorously, he had at times a sense of annoyance which made him fling out in surges of anger. A generous heart made his anger short-lived; his gratitude was enormous and abiding; and I doubt if, when he died, Brown had a grievance against any one in the world.

XV

I loved Brown the Bohemian without a thought of fame better than "George Douglas" the successful author; and my affection for his memory is not enhanced by the fact that he had justified himself

in a brilliant book. I have a melancholy pleasure in recalling numberless evenings we spent in London together: evenings wholly without excitement, and yet with a kind of uplifting pleasure in them that one rarely feels after first youth is left behind. This was the order and programme of these evenings: a quiet dinner in a favourite restaurant, where the landlord smiled a welcome, and the waiter was attentive but not fussy; where the food was good and of modest price. We sat in this place as other men sit in a club, and the talk was as free and varied as it could have been under the most favourable conditions. Two hours here, then a walk along the Embankment, up by deserted Queen Victoria Street, and round by St. Paul's; or west, away down by the quaint streets that still remain of old Chelsea; or a 'bus ride to a distant

terminus,—all the while surrendering ourselves to the mystery and magic which make a summer night in London an enchantment. Sometimes we talked continuously, and that was good; sometimes there were stretches of silence, and these were good too; but always we were united by a bond so close that we could not be estranged, yet so free that there was no constraint.

Had it been possible for Brown to have read this reminiscence, he would have read another name into it right through. I have not mentioned this name, save casually; but that is because he is one of the original three who had everything in common, even their individual pleasures with each other. To his home Brown went as to mine; from him he got help of a kind which I could not render, and to him he gave as sincere

an affection as he could give to any man. When the third member of our partnership came on the fatal last night to hurry Brown into being well by his own splendid vitality, neither of us thought that within a few hours we should be holding our friend's hands in his death agony. It was surely something more than a coincidence that we three should spend the supreme hour for one of us together.

Yet I confess I have a wholly personal and selfish satisfaction in turning up my copy of "The House with the Green Shutters," and reading the inscription there, writ large in Brown's own hand—*Amico Amicissimo Andreæ Melrose hunc libellum, Auctor*—the justification for this reminiscence of one of the bravest, cleanest, most brotherly souls I have ever met.

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